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Three of the best
aero helmets



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THIS MONTH

AUGUST ISSUE 75

DO THIS...

The time is now

The heat is on — turn up the gas and start your summer challenges!

Throughout the spring we focused on lining up challenges, starting to get the miles in and looking forward to the summer finally arriving. It's easy to keep putting off getting out for that long ride but summer is here and the time is now!

We visit Majorca this month on page 128 but with a heatwave hitting the UK, we can find our own sunny paradise here at home and there are some brilliant climbs across the country to test the legs. The mountain switchbacks may not be quite so easy to find, but with the winding roads of the Lake District or the famous southern slopes of Box Hill there's some excellent riding and scenic vistas on home soil.

Whether you're going for a single-day, multi-day event or your own personal challenge we've got plenty of fitness tips in this issue to get you on the road to sportive success. From pre-event tapering to what to eat during the ride and how to survive day-after-day in the saddle, we've got it covered.

Useful links

www.letapedutour.com
www.leukaemialymphomaresearch.org.uk/get-involved/sports-challenges/cycling
www.goskyride.com



IN

Bike libraries

Following the huge success of Yorkshire's Grand Départ, a new scheme is aiming to give every child in the county access to a bike.
bikelibraries.com



Summer fruits

At this time of year it's easy to increase your intake of vitamins and antioxidants, with peaches, strawberries, raspberries and nectarines readily available.

Women's racing

British Cycling has announced the re-establishment of a national women's road racing programme.

The Copenhagen Wheel

If you need a helping hand on a ride sometimes, this device can be attached to most bikes to provide a battery and motor.

Extra funding

The Conservatives have cut £23 million from the amount promised to make cycling a safer option in cities.

Litter

Dropping your gel wrappers at any time is really bad form — not good for the environment or the reputation of cyclists.



No ID

Carry identification with you on every ride 'In Case of Emergency'. Enter relevant details in your phone under the acronym ICE.
incaseofemergency.org

Chain tattoos

Now we're in shorts it's all too easy to sport one of these on the right calf. Messy!

OUT

Get motoring!

Study finds e-bikes help people cycle further and more often

Simon Schofield

The snobbier end of the cycling tribe can be a bit sniffy about e-bikes, cycles with motor assistance, but we are big fans because they get more bums on saddles. And now the first serious study of people's actual use of electric bikes has produced some fascinating findings.

"People travel twice as much on the electric bike, both in terms of kilometres, amount of trips and as part of total transportation," says Norway's Institute of Transport Economics. "The effect of having an electric bike was particularly strong on women," noted the researchers.

The study took two groups of regular cyclists. One group was given unlimited access to an e-bike; the other group used their own bikes. Both groups were asked to keep diaries of their rides. The e-bike group previously did 28 per cent of their journeys by bike. Once they'd been powered up, this increased to almost half of their journeys, and the average length of the journey also shot up.

Although some cyclists view a bit of help on

hills as 'cheating', this is a little unfair because you still have to pedal on e-bikes. The most sophisticated models power up the battery as you pedal, producing enough charge to kick in with assistance when it's needed for a longer period than cheaper models, which rely on the charge within the battery, giving a shorter range.

E-bikes are huge in mainland Europe and their appeal is growing here. They can be at their most useful for utility cycling and commuting, as the Norwegian research confirmed. "In order to cycle to work every day you have to prepare, take care of logistics and perhaps change and shower when you arrive. To many people it is too much of a project," the researchers stated.

"With an electric bike you reach greater distances in less time, and you may wear your ordinary clothes or a suit jacket since you don't sweat. Many of the shorter trips done by car today may potentially be done by e-bike."

Prices of e-bikes range from around £500 up to £1,500 and beyond.



500 The number of bone-shaking miles from Paris to Avignon Stuart Mason-Elliott will be tackling on a rare antique bike, for Cancer Research UK

44 or 62 miles

The choice of distances in the Lakeland Monster Miles Adventure Cross event in Cumbria, on October 4



RIDE TO LIVE

I've always ridden bikes and I've always lusted after new ones. It started with me desperate for a Raleigh Streetwolf... I never got one. But I first got interested in cycling about five years ago when I bought a road bike for a triathlon, fell off it, knocked myself out and found I was hooked.

I'm insanely lucky that I host a show for the BBC that is exactly linked to what I love doing with my spare time. It means I can use the excuse that I *have* to go out and ride for work reasons, and it not be a lie. Saying that, with the amount of people who love riding bikes now I think there should be tons more cycling on radio and TV — but then I would say that.

I currently ride a Stoemper Taylor. It's a lightweight custom steel number from America that has Godzilla on the head badge, is painted a shouty blue/neon pink and is ace.

My dream bike changes like the wind, which is part of the fun of it. Currently I'm lusting after a Condor Baracchi, a Ritte Snob Disc and a Mason Revolution all on a strict rotation. I like them individual, fast and with a paintjob that is louder than me.

I have done increasingly stupid things for BeSpoke [the Radio 5 Live cycling show Borg presents] but May was ridiculous. In that month I rode stage three of the Tour de Yorkshire in awful conditions, the Fred Whitton Challenge in worse weather and then 'attempted' the Hour record. I found it difficult to sit down by the end of the month.

Jens Voigt was a great rider. He led from the front in increasingly romantic breakaways that were doomed to failure 99 times out of 100. He was someone that even with his level of fame was down to earth, seemed to genuinely love the sport and is happy to shoot the breeze with fans and journalists.

Other than the usual failing to unclip at the lights moment, I have forgotten to properly attach my front wheel. Actually it was my friend's fault as he racked my bike for a triathlon. I was just finishing the cycling part when I pulled back to go over a cattle grid. Next thing I know I'm looking up at the faces of a number of worried people. It wasn't necessarily a comedy moment at the time but I could laugh about it later when someone showed me the picture. Much, much later.

You can see OJ on the next edition of **BeSpoke TV** on the BBC iPlayer and catch up on the latest podcast via the 5live website: www.bbc.co.uk/5live.

OJ Borg

Occupation: Radio and television presenter Age: 36
Riding: Great Manchester Cycle





Giro Amare women's helmet £99.99

Constructed using Giro's proprietary Thermoform SL reinforcement and Roc Loc 5 head cradle system, Giro says it has managed to create a compact helmet that is not only safe and comfortable, but ventilated too. Coming in a variety of designs, the Amare is a colourful alternative to the usual helmet offerings.

www.zyro.co.uk



Torq Snaq bars £1.99 each

Filling the gap in bellies and the healthy snack market, Torq says its guilt-free Snaq bars offer an alternative to cake and biscuits. Along with helping muscle repair and energy levels, the bars indulge us thanks to three yummy flavours, while three pence is donated to Leukaemia and Lymphoma Research for every one sold.

www.torqfitness.co.uk



Coffee & Cols espresso cups £38

Coffee and cycling go hand-in-hand — if you have a passion for one, the chances are you'll have a passion for the other. With several designs to choose from, these cycling themed cups pledge your allegiance to the pastime — even when sipping the good stuff on the sofa.

Buy singly for £10.95 or a set of four for £38.

www.coffeeandcols.com



Evoc Terminal £179.95

We really rate Evoc bike bags, so we're excited to see its new range of travel bags. Coming with both wheels and rucksack straps, the Terminal bag fits up to 60 litres of kit, with a dedicated padded space for a laptop and valuables, meaning it's an ideal companion for car-free weekends away.

www.silverfish-uk.com



Paceline Eurostyle Sports Wash £12.99 473ml

With standard laundry products often full of harsh cleaning chemicals, Paceline says its fragrance-free gentle wash removes dirt and odours without damaging technical fabrics. With just 15ml needed per wash load, it's potentially a really affordable way of prolonging the life of your cycling kit.

www.2pure.co.uk



Radial Pharos front light £29.99

With three light intensities and a claimed battery life of between two to nine hours, this front light also offers a swift and simple handlebar mount. The USB charger allows top-ups from a laptop, and weighing 68g, it's easily pocketable after locking the bike up, making it an ideal city commuting partner.

www.radialcycles.co.uk



Sockguy socks £9.95

We love Sockguy. Its designs never fail to make us smile, and its latest array of leery designs do just that. Made with 75 per cent ultra-wicking micro denier acrylic, the longer than average 6ft Crew Tartan socks aren't to everyone's taste, but we say 'go big or go home' for both sock length and pattern!

www.silverfish-uk.com



Chapeau Men's Classic bibshorts £70

Designed around the versatile Fiandre chamois, Chapeau says that the perforated dual density foam insert both keeps you fresh and offers support where you most need it. The predominately black shorts will match most cycling attire, living up to its namesake by providing you with that all-important classic little black number.

www.velobrands.co.uk



Ritchey WCS Zeta II wheelset £655

With wheels being one of the best bike upgrades, these handbuilt aluminium Zeta IIs offer the opportunity to go tubeless, or stay as a standard tyre and inner tube. With wider than average (17mm) rims Ritchey says they are also super stiff — a good bet for riders who traditionally suffer wheel flex.

www.paligap.cc

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Ride on the white stuff

Cycling has been linked to an increased risk of osteoporosis but dairy products can offset the danger of brittle bones



Simon Schofield

Regular cyclists can afford to ignore many of the health scare stories that pop up almost daily — because frequent exercise is an antidote to many common concerns. But there is one scare story that's worth consideration, as cyclists may be susceptible.

Bone density is an indicator of the strength of bones and refers to the amount of minerals within our bones. It declines with age, but even in younger, active cyclists, bone density can drop off. This makes osteoporosis, or brittle bone disease, more likely.

"Cyclists seem to be [in] the perfect storm for low bone density," says Dr Eric Haakonssen, a physiologist who works with cycling teams. The risk factors specific to cyclists are a lack of load-bearing exercise, calcium losses through sweat, a tendency to lose weight, and heavy training schedules — factors known to reduce the calcium levels in the body.

Happily, there is a simple way to counter the risks — and that's to increase the amount of dairy we eat and drink. Dr Haakonssen's new study also suggests that pre-ride consumption of dairy products is especially helpful. So a good, calcium-rich breakfast could comprise porridge made with milk and a tub of yoghurt, and a handful of nuts to provide balance.

Dr Haakonssen's study suggests that, for rides over 90 minutes, cheese sandwiches, a calcium-fortified protein drink or recovery drink made with milk may also help.

Consuming more calcium may not make you faster, but as a long-term preventative measure against future problems for regular cyclists, it makes a lot of sense.

The Great Boffo is back!

Publisher James Spackman is republishing the delightful classic children's picture book *The Great Boffo* in time for the 2015 Tour, reviving the Seventies cartoon. First released in 1973 by Frank Dickens, *The Great Boffo* tells the tale of a boy who wants to cheer on his favourite cyclist but first has to complete a delivery round on his old bike.

Spackman, who is publishing the cartoon through his Pursuit imprint, in conjunction with SnowBooks, said: "I'm delighted to be bringing Boffo back. My father used to read this wonderful book to me as a child. "As a fanatical cyclist myself, I regard Boffo as a personal hero, and it is a privilege to introduce him to a new generation."

The Great Boffo was released on June 29, priced at £14.99





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schwalbe.co.uk

SCHWALBE 12 DURANO

Thule Chariot Cougar £749.99

Knowing when or where to start riding with little ones can be a minefield for bike riding families. So to hear that Thule — a brand synonymous with safe bike transportation — has a range of carriers will be music to parents' ears.

There's a multitude of carriers and bike seats on offer, but Thule believes that of its Chariot range, the Cougar, pictured, is the most versatile. Badged as the classic all-rounder, it converts from a standard buggy, which is also perfect for using as a buggy jogger, to bike trailer (and even hiking and cross-country skiing if you're that way inclined)!

Coming with big wheels and adjustable suspension, the Cougar sounds ideal for off-road forays, especially with an extra 'Baby Supporter' available to give even the smallest of family members extra neck and core support for when the going gets rough. Unlike other child trailers, the front wheel stays with the carrier when using the bike

towing function, allowing you to use the Cougar as a buggy once you've reached your destination.

Thule says it adheres to the most stringent international health and safety regulations, so parents can rest assured regarding the safety aspect of using a bike trailer. But all these benefits don't come cheap — especially at a time when a family's budget is probably at its tightest. However, you are getting a lot of bang for your buck function-wise, and with a lifetime warranty, it'll probably outlast your family's needs. So if you're in the market for a do-it-all, go-anywhere trailer for your most precious cargo, you can't go far wrong. www.madison.co.uk



Give us space, please

Simon Schofield

The 'close pass' from inconsiderate, or even vindictive, drivers is a fact of life for cyclists. But now there's an increasing movement to try to cut down these scary encounters by gently reminding drivers that we need a bit of space. And the new distance that's safe to pass cyclists is emerging as a metre and a half.

Thepetitionsite.com is trying to get the Department of Transport to introduce a new road sign to remind drivers that cyclists need 1.5m and that riding two abreast is not illegal. More forward-thinking local authorities, like Leeds City Council, are even producing car stickers asking drivers to: 'Give cyclists room — at least 1.5m at all times.'

James Sutherland of the Leeds Club Cycling Forum says: "We've been working with the local authority on this and they have been very responsive. Let's hope it makes a difference."



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NCN saves £1m a day

Sustrans' National Cycle Network is 20 years old and still pointing the way to the future

The National Cycle Network, developed by charity Sustrans, celebrates its 20th birthday this year. It's likely that most of us have ridden on at least one section of the NCN, even if we don't know it. By focusing on encouraging and facilitating more local and everyday journeys to be made by bicycle, Sustrans' aim has been to get the nation healthier and reduce spending on medical conditions linked to physical inactivity.

According to new research from the sustainable transport charity, the NCN has saved the UK economy more than £7 billion since it was established 20 years ago (equivalent to £1m a day), by improving people's health and reducing congestion, pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

Malcolm Shepherd, Sustrans chief executive, said: "When we launched the National Cycle Network in 1995 we wanted to show both the huge potential and the enormous benefits of people being able to choose to make healthy journeys. The

figures speak for themselves — we have demonstrated beyond doubt that many more people walking and cycling is good for our health, and it's smarter for our economy.

"If a charity can lead the creation of a network of routes that runs the length and breadth of the country, imagine what could be possible if the government created safer conditions for walking and cycling, including reducing speed limits.

Closing the funding gap

"To make walking and cycling local journeys an option for everyone we need the new government to provide funding for cycling and walking to be equivalent of five per cent of the transport budget, and a Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy that contains a long-term vision and targets, in the same way that already exists for our roads and railways. This relatively small investment has the potential to have huge benefits for us all."

Dr Penny Woods, chief executive of the British Lung Foundation, added: "Air pollution

kills 29,000 people a year in the UK, and can lead to diseases like lung cancer, whilst worsening other lung conditions such as COPD and asthma. Yet, even though cars are responsible for 70 per cent of air pollution in urban areas, this is still how over two thirds of people choose to make journeys of between one and five miles. We therefore urgently need to look at ways in which we can support more people to make these shorter journeys by bike or on foot if they are able, and Sustrans are to be applauded for shining a light on the benefits this could have for our economy, our healthcare services, and the overall health of the nation."

This year marks 20 years since Sustrans gained funding from the National Lottery to develop the National Cycle Network, which now stretches to all four corners of the UK and covers over 14,000 miles running along traffic-free and quiet on-road routes. New data shows that in 2014 the Network saw over 4.9 million people make 764 million trips by bike and on foot.



Cycle paths make
economic sense

Festina Tour style

The 2015 edition of the Tour de France kicked off on July 4 but it's not too late to get your hands on the Festina official collection.

The timekeeping expert launched its special range of watches in celebration of Le Tour in the form of the Chrono Bike Collection.

The F16881 features a central bracelet that represents a bicycle chain, in line with the

cycling inspiration behind the Chrono range.

There is a wide range of models starting from £285 to the limited-edition F16883 that retails at £465.

www.festina.com



Cycling Active Summer correction page 44/45

Oops! It seems our scales were a little out when weighing the Racing Quattro wheelset on the Vitus Vitesse Evo Vri road bike, which won our Ultegra Di2 bike test. The claimed weight is 1,725g and not 1,950g stated in our last issue.

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KAYE'S TOOLBOX TIPS



CA's resident mechanic Kaye Patton is able to fix pretty much anything

Do you need a new chain?



TIME TAKEN
5
MINUTES

TOOLS FOR THE JOB
■ Chain-checker

Keeping your chain clean and well oiled is, after pumping up your tyres, top priority. Check your chain every time you ride your bike. It may not require attention every time, but it may need oiling or cleaning every other ride, depending on the conditions.

Learn to love your chain. It may look like a sticky relic from the age of steam compared to the rest of your bike, but chain drive is an incredibly efficient, simple and lightweight solution to transferring leg power to your back wheel.

A neglected chain will squeak, pick up dirt, change badly and look horrible. It will also wear out faster while also accelerating wear on your front chainrings and rear sprockets.

We have covered everyday chain-care previously, so this month we're looking at chain-life and associated issues.

1 This is a chain-wear checking tool. There are various types and brands, mostly high-quality, as in general they are used by serious mechanics. They cost about £5 and are a worthwhile addition to your cycling toolbox.

2 Most modern chains for road bikes have links that are the same distance apart, so a chain-checker can be used on most modern road bike chains. Chains do not 'stretch' from the side-plates; they get longer due to wear inside each roller. The chain checker will usually indicate +0.75, which is within tolerance, whereas +1.0 indicates excessive wear.



3 Place the tool on top of the chain, slotting the two prongs into the gaps between the side-plates. If you can't get them in or they are really tight, the chain is barely worn. If it slots in easily but is within +0.75, the chain is used but still serviceable. If it's over +0.75, you should consider replacing it.



4 Another occasional check: visually inspect the teeth on your chainrings and sprockets. Unworn teeth have a symmetrical profile with flat tops and semi-circular valleys. Worn teeth look hooked and sharp at the top, with uneven valleys. The middle sprockets of the cassette get the most use, so wears quickest.

5 Replacing your chain will maintain the efficiency of your drivetrain and prolong the life of your chainrings and sprockets. These will last for years if you keep everything clean and replace your chain every year or so. A shop can split and replace a chain in a few minutes — or you can do it yourself with a split-link.



Relax on holiday

Keen cyclists worry about de-training while not in the saddle on a regular basis. Thus, the two-week summer holiday may, paradoxically, be a source of stress.

We are a funny bunch — fretting about all our hard work going to waste as we stretch out by the

pool. But what are the facts? Four days straight off the bike has no effect at all on your condition. Over 12 days of inactivity, though, VO2 max — the body's maximal uptake of oxygen, an accurate marker of fitness — may decline by seven per cent. But the good news

is that, once back in the saddle, fitness quickly returns.

Many pro riders take a full month off the bike at the end of the season to recharge. US pro Ted King says: "It refreshes your body, mind, soul. It keeps you from burning out." So, relax.



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FROM THE ED



“Le Tour has it all”

You don't have to be a fan of professional cycle racing to get swept up in Tour de France fever this July.

Some of us remember when our daily dose of Tour news was hard to come by. Not so today, it's all over the internet, the TV and the papers.

If you are a sports 'jock' the Tour joins Wimbledon, the Ashes and the women's World Cup as a must-follow event this summer.

Week one of the three-week marathon soap story on wheels will be well under way by the time you read this and already there will be stories of heartbreak and joy from the roads of Holland, Belgium and France.

From the flat stages in Holland, where traffic furniture and nervous racing inevitably result in high speed catastrophes, to the short steep stage finish on the Mur de Huy in Belgium and the jarring cobbles of northern France, week one will be exhausting. And that's just for us lot watching on the telly.

Why is it so gripping? The bird's-eye helicopter shots of the bunch are mesmerising and Mark Cavendish's sprinting is heart in the mouth stuff. But as ordinary cyclists we also identify with the pros as they have to negotiate the same corners, hills and dodgy road schemes as we do, albeit at a more sedate pace.

Other sports are not the same somehow. We marvel at the sublime skills of ball players but there's not a lot of empathy there. When a bike rider falls off we know how it feels too, just as we thrill to the exhilaration of swooping down a long hill.

Vive le Tour!



Luke

Luke Edwardes-Evans Editor

Inbox

Write to us at

cyclingactive@ipcmedia.com

You never know what's in store

On my last commute from Altrincham to Daresbury I punctured twice on my way to work. Fortunately the second one was a short walking distance from the office. Work let me have one of the company cars during lunch, so that I could sort myself out some tubes.

Off I went to two posher bike shops. Amazingly none of them stored 35mm tubes with Presta valves. As I was wondering how I would get home that day, I came across the more unassuming shop that I googled earlier called 'Bike and Cars'. I found the staff much nicer than in the first two shops and crucially they sorted me out with the tubes I needed, and for good measure I bought a tyre as well.

Given their helpfulness I will keep them in mind for any bits I would usually order off the internet and for the few jobs that I do not do myself. Just goes to show that as with books, you should not judge a bike shop by its cover, as you might miss a good one.

Daniel, email

More bikes, please!

I'm a subscriber and, having just received the July edition of your magazine and had my customary first browse, I feel compelled to write and give Cathy Cawston a 'plus one' for the points she makes in her letter 'Get Real'.

Firstly, I can only agree with what she says about the weight loss/food articles. The weight loss achievements are laudable, and no doubt the articles on food are of great interest to many — but their frequency is a little overbearing!

Secondly, and far more of an issue for me, are the bike reviews. There has to my mind been a gradual but inexorable move toward them being almost exclusively of rather expensive drop bar equipped bikes. Take this month's issue as an example. Apart from a look at the latest (£945) Brompton folder, the other eight bikes looked at are all



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drop bar bikes, with an average price of £1,236. I'm sure that will please lots of your readers, but there are surely lots of hybrid bikes/flat bar road bikes/city bikes out there that would be of interest to others too? Or perhaps it's just me...

Jon North, email

Sportive sorrow

After riding the Tour de Cambridge recently I felt congratulations were in order, but also some points to take forward.

The organisation of the event was pretty good, although I felt there was a certain alarmist approach to getting people to register and turn up early, but I guess if it works then it works. The problem is that those of us who would turn up early anyway then turn up even earlier! And I still managed to be 30 minutes back from the start gun after being delayed by other members of our group. Two of our group started in the race pen and the rest of us with the main pack. Out of our group, five of us qualified for the World Amateur Championships — not me though.

The support along the route was overwhelming and really helped us along the way. The feed station I stopped at to help a friend with his gears was well stocked and organised. The cookies were a nice surprise and the Shimano mechanic was very good to come over and check I'd done a proper job.

However. It's always the same, certain riders have no disregard for others. I had a few moments where a train leader would put himself on my front wheel, then the following cyclists would all try and squeeze in between his back wheel and my front. Then when I was in a train with my group in matching jerseys, riders were trying to catch on to the leader's back wheel without doing a shoulder check. It's to be expected in a 'sportive' so I wasn't that bothered. What really annoyed me was the lack of care at the feed stops. Riders blocking two lanes of road because they didn't want to queue to get in, so went round to jump in at the front. Then after one feed station a rider in front of me took one bite of his bar and lobbed the rest of it into my front wheel. Firstly it was



Drop-bar bike overload!



Monitor your fitness... and your health

STAR LETTER

Life cycles

I expect my story is similar to a lot of people in so far as I did a lot of cycling until well into my thirties, then it tailed off a bit, and in my mid forties I decided to get back into it. To begin with it was difficult, getting back into the rhythm of cycling, using the right gears and so on, but I got fitter and slimmer. I can now do 50 miles or so with no trouble.

As I got fitter I got faster but I was only timing myself with a watch. I had read about computers, and so on, and I bought a blood pressure monitor, then a heart rate monitor to work out my resting heart rate, and a basic bike computer. What a difference that has made to my cycling — it is amazing.

When I checked my heart rate I noticed that my blood pressure was above the recommended level in the guidebook.

I am only 52 and live a healthy lifestyle, have always played competitive sport and eaten well, so I was a little surprised.

The doctor told me to check it for a week. Long story short, I now take medication to control my high blood pressure. I can still continue to cycle and exercise.

My point is, not only has cycling helped me to lose weight and improve my fitness, but has also undoubtedly reduced my risk of having a stroke or a heart attack in the future. Cycling not only makes you fitter, it can without doubt prolong your life as well.

Ian, email



Letter of the month wins a pair of Shimano R107 cycling shoes worth £99.99!

disrespectful to the locals for littering and secondly downright dangerous not even looking where he was throwing it! He said sorry, but sorry didn't pick it up off the floor so nobody would slip on it. I saw others throwing rubbish into bushes along the route. It hurts seeing this but I can't stop and pick all of it up! I only have three jersey pockets and I need to fit my own food and rubbish as well as my pump, phone and arm-warmers!

Next year I'm going to have a race licence so I can start at the front. Hopefully if I'm in front of the main pack I won't see as much littering too. It won't stop the problem but it won't make me feel so sad!

Simon Tuck, email

CYCLING ACTIVE

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NEW BIKE TESTED

WHY THIS BIKE?

Blends style with comfort perfectly
BEST FOR

Epic sportive rides

TESTED THIS MONTH

250 miles on a mix of commutes and trips to the seaside



BMC GF02 105 £1,800

Mile-munching Swiss stealth bomber

Rob Hoyles

Let's not start another bike test crammed full of meaningless metaphors and Classics comparisons that are more cobbles than cobbles. Instead let's look at BMC's excellent mid-range GF02 105 as another bike to add to the shopping list of anyone more interested in cable-tying a number to their bars than they are in pinning one on their back.

All the usual bike builders' tricks apply to the GF02. With a designation that denotes 'Gran Fondo' this bike is pure sportive addict territory. And while the sales blurb will have you believe that this bike was conceived purely for pro riders tackling the rough and tumble of northern Europe during the least pleasant months of the racing season, just a glimpse at the frame design and geometry quickly reveals that this bike's

main raison d'être is as a fast but comfortable mile-muncher for normal guys and gals with body fat percentages well into double figures, UCI-approved sticker notwithstanding.

Frameset

As is the convention, the head tube is taller than that of its racing stablemate, the SLR. The top tube slopes to allow for this before, somewhat less conventionally, splitting into what BMC calls the 'Crosslock Connection' which is the small bridge you'll have no doubt spotted between the top tube and the seat tube. Other than sounding a bit like a new Tarantino film, what this does is allow a little flex through the rear of the frame and up to the rider's backside.

It's all part of BMC's 'Tuned Compliance Concept' which leads us on to the 'Angle Compliance' seatstays that lend a certain elegance to the rear end. These slender, flattened stays contrast with the purposeful-looking chainstays that end with cantilevered dropouts, again designed to help soak up any road vibrations. The BB shell is sizable and is

"After 300 miles there are no creaks or rattles — the GF02 has been designed for big rides"

Specification

Frameset BMC TCC carbon-fibre
Gears Shimano 105 11-speed
Chainset Shimano 105
Brakes Shimano 105
Wheels Shimano RS11
Tyres Continental Ultra Sport 2 SL 700x28C
Bars BMC RDB 3
Stem BMC RST 3
Saddle Selle Royal Saba
Seatpost BMC compliancepost, carbon with 18mm offset
Weight 8.25kg (54)
Size range 48, 51, 54, 56, 58, 61cm
Size tested 54cm
Contact www.evanscycles.com

not only very stiff — it's also exactly the right size for the Shimano BB86 Press-Fit bottom bracket. That might sound daft, but you'd be surprised how many poorly engineered frames creak in dismay at the mere mention of a Press-Fit BB. If there's one thing that's assured with BMC, it's build quality.

Components

No corners have been cut with Shimano's excellent 11-speed 105 groupset. You get the full shebang, including the vastly improved four-spoke chainset that takes its styling cues directly from Dura-Ace along with the revised 105 brake calipers — two items that are often ditched in favour of cost-cutting alternatives. Something else that struck me is how light and clean-shifting the gears were. Whether this is down to BMC's decision to stick with external cable routing is only supposition, but along with easy home maintenance I'd have to say it's a good thing — save the marginal gains aero stuff for the racers.

Finishing kit is BMC's own and is top-notch. The bars and stem offer ergonomics and sufficient rigidity while the proprietary seatpost has (surprise, surprise) been designed for comfort. Offset is 18mm as standard, though should you prefer, your dealer will be able to equip you with a 3mm or 30mm option.



RS11 wheelset could spend summer in the shed



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Wheels

Shimano's new RS11 (11-speed) wheelset is fairly basic. There's little more to add other than it's robust and will last well. Our advice would be to save them for the winter miles and treat yourself to something lighter. The same goes for the 28mm tyres — they're great for awful weather and even worse roads, but a bit OTT the rest of the time. Fit some good quality 25s and you'll enjoy the bike a lot more.

Riding

Having swapped the somewhat over-padded stock Selle Royal Saba saddle for my preferred Fizik Antares, and the voluminous 28mm tyres for a set of skinny 23s (I know, how very last year), I'm happy to say that comfort is on a par with any 'endurance-focused' machine I've swung a leg over. Acceleration isn't exactly brisk, but then it would be unfair to call it ponderous. Predictable is perhaps a better word and one that also happens to suit the handling. Neutral and easygoing, thanks in part to the raked-out fork that slows the steering slightly means that sketchy, poorly surfaced descents are where this bike truly excels. It's not too bad at going uphill, either, though this is mostly due to the generous gear ratios — this isn't a particularly light bike, though much of its hidden timber lies in the wheelset.

Conclusion

Make no mistake, this is a great looking bike. And it's beautifully made. After 300 miles there are no creaks or rattles and I've not so much as had to turn a barrel adjuster. The quality translates to a bike that's as nice to own as it is to ride. It's been designed for big rides and whether it was BMC's intention or not, thanks to the simplicity of the layout, it will be an easy bike to keep in fine fettle for even the least experienced home tinkerer. Of course, there are cheaper bikes out there equipped with the higher-spec Ultegra groupset. But if you're after a quality machine that will probably outlive you, with a frame that's well worth the occasional component upgrade, then the BMC is a solid choice. **End**



Shimano 105 is present throughout

VERDICT

A well-engineered machine that's comfortable enough for epic, all-day rides but brisk enough for the odd Strava KOM

Spot on...

- Top quality frameset
- No skimping on parts
- Superb long-range comfort

Could do better

- Weighty wheelset
- Saddle is a bit *too* soft

SPECIFICATION LEVEL	16/20
BUILD QUALITY	19/20
ROAD HANDLING	18/20
RIDE COMFORT	18/20
VALUE FOR MONEY	17/20
OVERALL RATING	88 /100

ALTERNATIVES

Specialized Roubaix SL4 Elite £1,800

Named after the famous Paris-Roubaix Classic, years of development have gone into the Zertz shock-absorbing inserts that adorn the Roubaix's fork and seatstays. Some could argue that it's less than engaging to ride, but if you regularly ride rough roads it could be just the thing. Similar 105 spec to the GF02, save for a Praxis chainset and 25mm tyres. www.specialized.com



Giant Defy Advanced Pro 2 £1,899

Another endurance bike from a big name brand bedecked with the latest 105 groupset. Well, almost. The Giant eschews the 105 brake calipers in favour of TRP Spyre mechanical disc brakes along with some rather nifty-looking aero wheels. It's a slightly different take on the endurance theme but has all the right ingredients to make an excellent all-day sportive machine. www.giant-bicycles.com



CA EXPLAINER

Sloping top tubes

Many years ago, all bikes had horizontal top tubes. Subsequently, sizing was often compromised as the standover height was dictated by the length of the head tube. With a sloping top tube, a tall head tube doesn't have to affect the standover. It also allows more seatpost to show above the seat tube. This helps with comfort as the post absorbs road buzz. While sloping top tubes originally allowed manufacturers to produce fewer sizes, the quest for the perfect fit has resulted in more sizes with each capable of suiting a wider range of riders than ever before.



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NEW BIKE TESTED

WHY THIS BIKE?

It's an ultra-fast flat-bar road bike for roadies turned commuters or leisure riders

BEST FOR

Nipping around traffic and urban obstacles at speed

TESTED THIS MONTH

Around the badlands of South Croydon



B'Twin Triban 500 Flat Bar £260

A £260 flat-bar bike with an incredible turn of pace

Matt Lamy

We all know the B'Twin range of bikes from Decathlon's chain of sports superstores offers some amazing drop-bar packages, but what can it do with a flat-bar machine? This Triban 500 FB can be yours for a jaw-dropping £260 — surely there's no way any company is able to offer a half-decent hybrid for £260? It seems B'Twin has, actually, and this might be a whole lot more than a simple hybrid.

Frameset

If the basic shape of the Triban 500 FB looks familiar, it's because that tidy aluminium frame is the same that has appeared on B'Twin's entry-level Triban drop-bar road bikes for the last few years. It's a very smart, simple design,

with a semi-compact shape and neat welds. Its attractively rounded tubeset is even a little sculpted in places. In fact, this bike has some of the sexiest, most speed-oriented chainstays you'll ever see on an alloy hybrid.

Up front we're provided with a steel fork, which is not only a budget consideration but also a nod towards comfort, with steel's forgiving ride intended to help soak up road imperfections. There's also a decent-length head tube, so the position is relatively high.

Components

To hit that £260 price, B'Twin has had to play around with the spec, and it's ended up with a smorgasbord of parts. SRAM 3.0 shifters and rear mech are teamed with a Microshift front derailleur, which is paired with a B'Twin triple chainset. Microshift is still quite a niche brand, but front gear changes are pretty good. Similarly, the SRAM mech at the back is happy enough to flick through gears on the flat, but under load — such as downshifts on a climb — it starts to feel a little agricultural. On the plus side, that triple chainset and 14-28t cassette means there's no shortage of gearing options on those climbs.

One interesting piece of specing is

Specification

Frameset: 6061-T6 aluminium, steel fork

Gears: SRAM 3.0 (levers and r), Microshift R8 (f)
7-speed, 14-28t

Brakes: B'Twin Sport dual-pivot calipers
Chainset: B'Twin triple 48/38/28t

Wheels: B'Twin Sport Aero
Tyres: Hutchinson Equinox 23c

Bar: B'Twin Sport Oversize aluminium
Stem: B'Twin Sport Oversize aluminium
Saddle: Sport Royal
Seatpost: B'Twin Sport aluminium

Size range: S, M, L, XL
Size tested: M

Weight: 10.9kg / 24lb

Contact: www.decathlon.co.uk

“The tubeset is attractively rounded, and the chainstays are some of the sexiest you'll see on an alloy hybrid”

the appearance of B'Twin's dual-pivot caliper rim brakes. Most flat-bar bikes at any price come with either cantilever/V-brakes or discs, but this is a reminder that the Triban 500 FB is a flat-bar road bike rather than a multi-tasking hybrid.

These particular calipers have decent enough power in the dry — as always, a new set of aftermarket blocks would probably do wonders — but they'll perform less well in the wet. Their biggest downfall, though, is that they don't allow the room to fit much bigger-capacity rubber, so you're stuck with thin road bike tyres.

Wheels

What about those tyres? The 23c Hutchinson Equinox tyres grip well in the dry, but they contribute very little towards cushioning the ride. Meanwhile, the B'Twin Aero wheelset spins smoothly. ('Aero' wheels on a £260 hybrid might seem a little improbable, but we're giving B'Twin the benefit of the doubt.)



Dual-pivot calipers limit tyre clearance

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- 3-Steel core tyre levers •
- 1-2 in 1 crank tool for standard square
type & Shimano® splined Octalink and ISIS
- 1-Chain rivet extractor for 8/9/10 speed
chains, with 1 spare pin
- 1-Multi-wrench chainring nut wrench
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Bar position is fairly high and comfortable



Premium brand tyres

Riding

The reason B'Twin gets away with calling these wheels 'Aero' is because this bike is fast — really fast. When it comes to getting away from the lights, you'll be as quick as any other pedal-powered road warrior, even those riding drop-bar bikes. Meanwhile, the flat bars really help you make the most of its lively control, accurately flicking it around the urban landscape.

In short, the Triban 500 FB feels like the ultimate flat-bar machine for people used to a sporty bike, who'll appreciate the stiff — super-stiff — performance and efficient power delivery. On the other side of the coin, though, most people with £260 to spend on a hybrid might be looking for something a little more forgiving and a little less performance-driven. Riding the Triban, at the end of a long-distance daily commute, the new cyclist may end up feeling a little battered and breathless.

Conclusion

The biggest problem for the B'Twin 500 FB is our expectations. Closed-minded, experienced cyclists may doubt that a £260 bike could possibly be good enough for them. Meanwhile, novice riders might innocently believe a £260 bike hybrid will offer a multi-purpose cycling experience. Both are wrong.

This is possibly the most specialised bike available below £300, offering simply fantastic performance and almost-too-good value. Had B'Twin stuck another £200 on the retail price, our expectations would be different. Suffice to say, if getting to work at speed is your priority, this bike does the job as well as almost any machine. **End**



SRAM X3: ace quality at this bargain price

VERDICT

The Triban 500 Flat Bar is a fast urban bike at a crazy-low price. Want a budget runaround? This is it

Spot-on...

- Very fast, enthusiastic frame
- Decent caliper road brakes
- Price is simply astonishing

Could do better

- This is a firm ride, so not one for leisurely pootling
- Gearset suffers slightly under load

SPECIFICATION LEVEL	14/20
BUILD QUALITY	18/20
ROAD HANDLING	20/20
RIDE COMFORT	17/20
VALUE FOR MONEY	20/20
OVERALL RATING	91/100

ALTERNATIVES

Claud Butler Urban 100 £259.99

Claud Butler's Urban range of hybrids hits the same speed-driven urban runaround brief as the Triban 500 FB but does it in a slightly different way. The aluminium frame is a very interesting, well-sculpted option, but the full build comes with Shimano Tourney gears. A triple chainset at the front and 12-28t cassette offers plenty of options, while alloy V-brakes bring you to a halt.



Raleigh Strada 1 £300

A little bit more expensive than the B'Twin, this very smart Strada 1 from Raleigh is not at all like a budget bike, given its very tasteful matt finish over its classy alloy frame. Components are equally impressive, with a full Shimano drivetrain, including triple chainset, aluminium V-brakes and 35c Schwalbe Silento tyres. It's available in either compact diamond frame or step-through frame.



CA EXPLAINER

Hybrid v flat-bar road bikes

What's the difference between a hybrid and a flat-bar road bike? A quick glance at each type reveals very little difference. Hybrids aim to combine the speed benefits of full-size road wheels with the comfort, control and road presence of a more upright, mountain bike-style riding position, whereas flat-bar road bikes are essentially (drop-bar) road bikes with flat bars. Obvious, really.



Cross-bred bikes: mutants or marvels?

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Pinnacle Arkose Three £999

Smart do-it-all cross bike that won't weigh you down

Steve Shrubsall

Cyclo-cross bikes are a work of compromise. They aren't averse to a bit of action on the blacktop, while at the same time not shying away from a good old rustic romp. Admittedly, a cross bike will never be as home on the road as an, erm, road bike. But they can hold their own on rides of a moderate length, and when confronted with bit of dirt or gravel, they won't start crying and run home to their mummy. Pinnacle's latest offering, the Arkose Three, is one such machine — it's well up for any terrain you toss at it.

Frameset

Compared to Pinnacle's 2014 model, this Three is noticeably lighter, which —



Rear seatstays offer ample clearance for a range of tyres

regardless of the terrain you wish to traverse — is always a boon. The 6061-T6 heat-treated aluminium is covered with a garish coating of bright green paint. It's a tad lairy, but I like it. It means I will be seen, and being seen is conducive to not being hit by a lorry. A full carbon fork and some rather incongruous decals finish this frameset, whose angles err towards a relaxed rather than racy ride.

Components

Shimano takes care of the componentry, save for a smattering of FSA and SRAM. I was quite pleased to note 105 had been assigned lever, shifter, front and rear mech duties — Shimano's mid-range technology is known for its durability and reliable performance. SRAM's mechanical disc brakes, while taking a while to bed in and making a noise not dissimilar to a traumatised cat in the process, suit the MO of a cyclo-cross bike — modulation is spot-on, as is the ability to shake off any crud accumulated on the trails. An FSA Omega compact chainset and BB-4000 bottom bracket complete the heavy

"Pinnacle's Arkose Three is well up for any terrain you toss at it"

Specification

Frameset 6061-T6 heat treated aluminium, triple-butt and flat-welded tubes
Gears Shimano 105
Chainset FSA Omega Compact
Brakes SRAM BB7 SL mechanical disc
Wheels Alex ATD
Tyres Kenda K1047
Bars Pinnacle
Stem Pinnacle SL 4 bolt Road Ahead
Saddle Pinnacle Race men's
Seatpost Pinnacle aluminium
Weight 9.95kg/21.93lb
Size tested Large (54)
www.evanscycles.com

artillery with finishing kit coming courtesy of Pinnacle's own-brand items.

Wheels

Alex rims are laced to KT sealed-bearing, six-bolt hubs with stainless butted spokes; as a unit, they look nice — handsome even — but it's on the trails and fire roads, caked in muck, while ricocheting off roots, that their real raison d'être shines through. They may look pretty but these hoops are at home when given a solid thrashing — although the budget Kenda rubber they are shod in could very well be bound for the back of the shed.

Riding

Given its rugged demeanour and poise in the bucolic arena, you'd be forgiven for thinking that the Arkose has the same off-road flexibility as an mtb. Do not fall into this trap. You will hurt yourself. Although cyclo-cross bikes excel on unmade roads, they are very reluctant to indulge in any airtime... as I found out, to the detriment of my left wrist.

However, while bombing over smooth or rutted terrain, I very quickly became enamoured with this machine, dividing my rides between the Downs Link (off-road) and commutes to work. As expected, the 105 gearing made for a fluid pedal, and the 11-32t cassette ensured I was well catered for on a variety of terrain.

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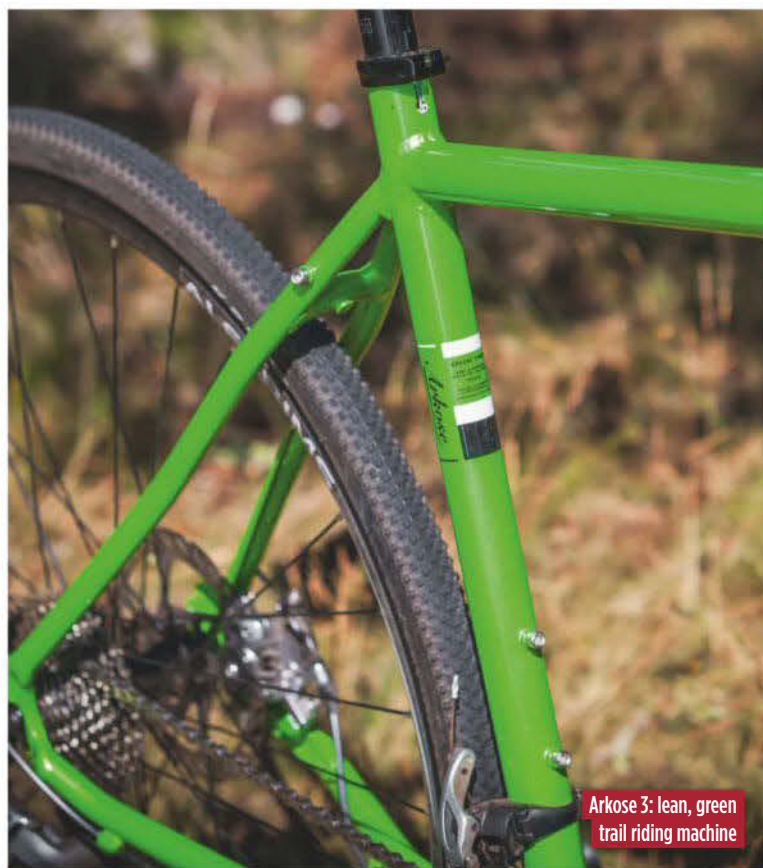
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Arkose 3: lean, green trail riding machine

As mentioned, the disc brakes took some time to settle down, but once they'd bedded in I was treated to a top-drawer stopping experience. These were brought into play on numerous occasions along the Downs Link, where they saved the life of several little bunnies and a poodle or two.

Conclusion

Overall weight of 9.95kg for a cross bike is very respectable, meaning the confident ride that the Arkose Three offers doesn't come at the cost of burdensome heft. In fact, it is one of the lighter cyclo-cross bikes on the market. The fact that you need not be restricted to off-road use — with a simple change of tyres, the Arkose will effortlessly mutate into a perfectly adequate commuter or even touring bike — makes it well worth the asking price. See you in the woods... **End**



Disc brakes were great once bedded in



Own-brand saddle comes with matching green rails

VERDICT

All-rounder with a penchant for trail blazing

Spot on...

- Light weight
- Snappy frame colour
- Loves a rut

Could do better

- More forgiving/padded bar tape

SPECIFICATION LEVEL	17/20
BUILD QUALITY	18/20
ROAD HANDLING	18/20
RIDE COMFORT	18/20
VALUE FOR MONEY	18/20
OVERALL RATING	89 /100

ALTERNATIVES

Canyon Inflite

£1,199

Featuring Shimano 105 and Mavic Crossride 29 Disc wheels, the Canyon Inflite is a real mud-muncher and boasts bags of agility and comfort at an economically viable rate.

www.canyon.com



Tifosi CK1 £999

The English manufacturers with the Italian name (Tifosi means supporters or fans) brings us the CK1. This Campag-equipped crosser offers a low-slung, no frills off-road experience. And at a penny south of a grand, it's a pretty nice price too.

www.tifosicycles.co.uk



CA EXPLAINER

Summer cyclo-cross

The London Cyclo-Cross Summer Series is a great way to pit your skills and fitness against like-minded folk in a friendly atmosphere, with riders of all abilities taking part. This year's league runs weekly from July 23 to August 13 and venues include a course at the famous Herne Hill Velodrome. Entry is £10 for seniors and £3 for youths and under-12s.

www.summerseries.co.uk



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Floor pumps

“Pump it up, homeboy,” counselled MC Hammer, “pump it up, it’s time.” As cyclists, we can only agree and obey. First, select your weapon...

Getting your tyre pressures right is critical to having a good ride. Too low and you will have sloppy handling and heavy road feel; too high and you will be bumped around and uncomfortable while handling suffers. You also need to adjust your tyre pressure to the conditions: in winter, you should run lower pressures to improve grip on wet roads, whereas in summer slightly higher pressure means less rolling resistance and helps you cover longer distances more easily.

For those who ride off-road, either on a mountain bike or a cyclo-cross or adventure road bike, getting the tyre pressure just right is even more important because it is critical to ensuring grip in loose conditions and — if you are using inner tubes — avoiding pinch flats.

Many mtbs come with Schrader rather than Presta valves, so you will need your pump to be compatible with both types. And if you intend to use it for a track bike, it will need to reach much higher pressures.

Inflating your tyres with a mini-pump before you set out is an option, but it’s a lot quicker, easier and more comfortable if you have a separate floor pump (AKA track pump) at home. Most track pumps come with a gauge, so that you can accurately determine the tyre’s pressure. They have a stable base, and most have a metal barrel good for longevity and pumping efficiency. The handle needs to be comfortable and wide enough that its ends don’t dig into your hands.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Long hose

It’s helpful to have a long hose on a pump, so that you can find somewhere stable to place the pump body without needing to move the bike. If you use a bike stand, a long hose helps access the valve while the bike is lifted off the ground, without having to fiddle around with the valve’s position.

Easy attachment

The connector from the pump to the valve needs to be easy to fit, without disturbing the core of a Presta valve, which can result in loss of air from the tyre. The connector should be compatible with Presta and Schrader valves, so that the pump can be used on mtb tyres too.

Gauge readability

A floor pump should have a gauge so that you can easily assess what pressure you have reached. Often this is at floor level, so it needs to be clearly graduated and large enough to ensure that you can read it — particularly if you have poor eyesight.



Birzman Maha Apogee III £54.99

The stand-out feature of the Birzman is the snap-on valve connector. Pull back the gold collar, push onto the valve, then push it back up and the pump is ready to use. It has a solid, quality feel with a large, stable three-legged aluminium base and barrel, a wooden handle, long hose and a quality, accurate gauge that is easy to use. The barrel leans at a slight angle towards you, which makes using the pump more comfortable. It took 23 strokes to reach the magical 100psi.

5

Easy-to-use, quality pump with clever valve connector



www.i-ride.co.uk

Zefal Profil Max Fp50 £41.99

The Zefal pump is stable, with a nice wide base and has a large gauge with a magnifier which can be moved to make the target pressure easier to judge. Even so, when measuring with a separate gauge, I found pressure was a few psi lower than indicated by the pump. It's efficient and comfortable to use, at 21 strokes to 100psi and has a longish hose and an efficient connector. It's quite heavy at 1,705g but comes with a comfortable rubberised handle.

8

Solid pump with an easy-to-read gauge



www.chickencycles.co.uk

Oxford Alloy £29.99

The Oxford Alloy track pump has quite a small base with two legs, which results in a rather wobbly feel in use. Nevertheless it's quite efficient at 24 strokes to reach 100psi, and the gauge is accurate and positioned part-way up the barrel, which increases readability. The hose too is quite short, and with many plastic parts the pump is the lightest on test, at 960g. It's reasonably comfortable to use with an easy-to-grip, chunky plastic handle.

7

A bit wobbly, owing to its small base



www.oxprod.com

Axiom Annihilateair G200A £95

This really is a chunky piece of kit with a huge, stable base and raised pegs, so that there's no way your feet will slip around when using it. The gauge is large with clear graduations and it has a long hose with a chunky connector. The handle is grippy and comfortable and, with its long stroke, the pump gets to 100psi in only 20 strokes — second best on test. All this comes at a price, though, and at £95 it's by far the most expensive pump here. Pump-bling.

10

An uber-pump, but with a price tag to match



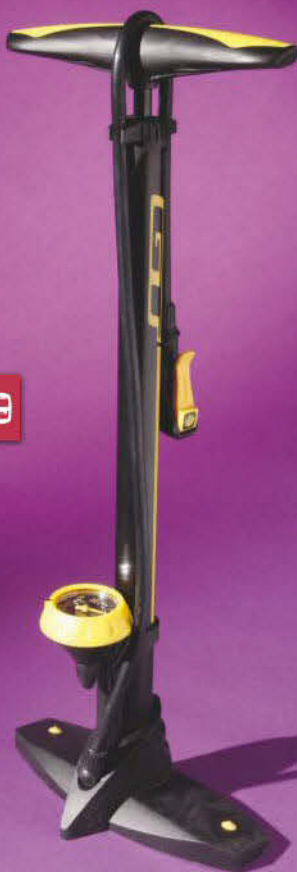
www.pallgap.co.uk

GT Track £24.99

At 62cm high, the GT pump is short and has quite a short stroke, reflected in the 29 strokes needed to get to 100psi. The hose is also quite short, at 78cm, although I found that the pressure achieved when measured with a separate pressure gauge was exactly 100psi. At 1,123g, it's quite light for a floor pump and so is easily portable. It's comfortable to use, though the handle is quite narrow. Despite having only two legs, the base is stable too.

9

A serviceable pump at a very reasonable price



www.gtbicycles.com

Topeak Joe Blow Max II £28.99

The Topeak needed the fewest pump strokes, just 19, to get a 23mm tyre up to 100psi. But those strokes required a lot of effort once the tyre got to higher pressures. This is probably because of its quite short stroke. The hose too is on the short side. Despite having just two legs to its base, the pump was stable and the handle was comfortable to use. The gauge is reasonably easy to see, though it under-measures pressure by a few psi.

7

An efficient pump but with slightly awkward ergonomics



www.extrauk.co.uk

Lezyne Sport Floor Drive £36.99

The Lezyne pump has a solid feel with a steel base and barrel and a wooden handle, although at the top of its stroke the plunger feels rather loose in the narrow barrel. Taking 26 strokes to reach 100psi isn't the best, though it's comfortable to use and the stroke is quite long. It's got a nice long hose, so it's easy to reach the tyre's valve — and the connector is easy to use, as is the large, clear gauge.

8

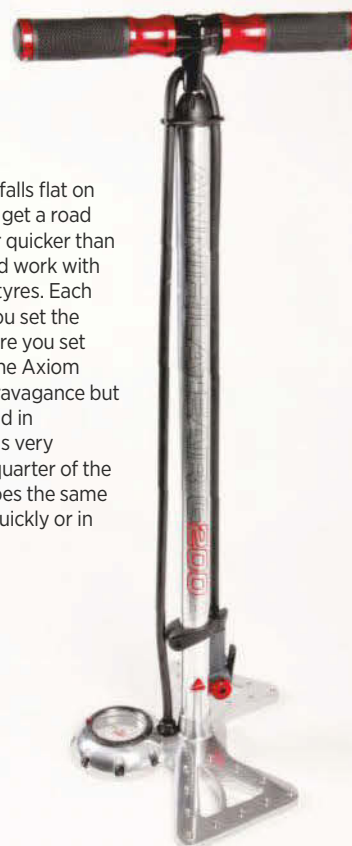
A quality pump with a solid feel and easy action



www.upgradebikes.co.uk

VERDICT

None of these pumps falls flat on performance. They all get a road tyre up to pressure far quicker than does a mini-pump, and work with Schrader-valved mtb tyres. Each has a gauge, letting you set the pressure spot-on before you set out. At almost £100, the Axiom Annihilateair is an extravagance but will get you on the road in super-quick time and is very robust. For around a quarter of the price, the GT pump does the same job, just not quite as quickly or in such style.





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Aluminium bounces back

You don't need carbon to put the pedal to the metal

Words Paul Norman **Photos** Mike Prior

A few years back, it seemed that aluminium-framed bikes were destined to be the also-rans of the new bike race. With carbon frames becoming ever cheaper to produce and manufacturers offering carbon bikes at lower and lower prices, it seemed as though aluminium would only be used for bargain basement entry-level bikes.

But now aluminium is making a comeback. Some manufacturers like Cannondale have always offered premium aluminium-framed bikes alongside their carbon ranges, but there's an increasing number of options from all makers, often with similar specs to their carbon ranges, just at slightly lower prices.

Carbon-fibre has advantages over aluminium: the properties of metals are the same in all dimensions (the technical term is that they are isotropic), whereas carbon fibres can be laid down so that strength and flexibility are different in different dimensions and this can be designed to match the forces exerted on a bicycle in use.

Aluminium tubes need to be manipulated to tune their ride characteristics, a process which has become increasingly sophisticated over the years.

We've tested three aluminium-framed bikes at different prices and with very different characteristics to see how well aluminium works for different types of riding.

The Allez is an aluminium stalwart with a quality frame and which has been offered by Specialized for many years, while the Merida is an example of an aluminium bike with a similar geometry and spec to an aero carbon equivalent. The Emonda is a new aluminium version of Trek's flagship ultra-light climber's bike, which Trek claims continues the lightweight theme.



Trek Emonda ALR 6 £1,700

Quality welding

Some aluminium bikes have unfinished spot welds which look unsightly, but the three here have high-quality, smoothly finished welds which look nicer and are stronger, as they better distribute stresses. It can be hard to distinguish the best-finished aluminium bikes from carbon frames.

Carbon seatpost

Another feature that improves comfort is a carbon seatpost, which should deform more under stress than alloy and so improve comfort. There's one on the Merida and the Trek, although in the Merida its chunky aero design may limit its comfort value.

Merida Reacto 400 £1,150

Carbon forks

Aluminium bikes usually come with carbon forks, which should help to smooth out road buzz and bumps. Only the Specialized here has aluminium forks rather than carbon, although we were nevertheless impressed with its ride comfort.

Aero features

The Merida has aero-section frame tubes, which should help reduce wind resistance and improve performance. The seat tube is carved out to shield the rear wheel and it's got an aero seatpost too. The rear brake is mounted under the bottom bracket to keep it out of the airflow.

Specialized Allez £600

Aluminium bikes What to expect

- Butted tube shapes
- Engaging ride
- Lower price than equivalent carbon bikes

Specialized Allez £600

Long-standing model is beginning to show its age

The Allez is Specialized's entry-level road bike and comes equipped with Shimano's eight-speed Claris mechanicals. The Allez has been around for years and is a popular choice as a first road bike, owing to the American brand's reputation for quality. While other brands may offer more exotic components at this price, remember that you get a lifetime warranty on your Specialized frame. The company backs its products.

Frameset

Specialized makes quality aluminium frames, with the basic Allez no exception. The welds and tube junctions are very tidy and use double-buttet A1 premium aluminium. Specialized claims that a breakthrough in weld location allows for a more durable, stiffer head tube junction. In turn, this allows for more material to be removed in lower stress areas, reducing weight.

Available in black, white and the orange we have here, the Allez is a smart-looking bike with an excellent quality finish. I really like the orange option; it stands out from the plethora of black bikes currently out there and reminds my inner nine-year-old of a tiger.

Components

With the Allez, you appear to be spending most of the £600 price on the quality frame and, dare we say it, the name. Less well-known brands tend to offer a higher spec

at this price. The components are very basic — you don't even get a full Shimano Claris groupset. The brakes are unbranded, while the saddle, bars and stem are all good-quality proprietary Specialized components. The chainset is a compact 34-50, with the rear cassette 11-32. Although this gives large jumps in the gear ratios, this leads to a reasonable top-end turn of speed and very easy gears for climbing.

Wheels

With many a Surrey lane resembling the surface of the moon, I was pleased to discover that, although budget, the wheels on the Allez are durable, standing up well to crater impacts on our supposedly first-world road network. The downside to the wheels' durability is that they are pretty heavy,

ALTERNATIVE

B'Twin Triban 540

Sacrifice the Specialized name and there are alternatives with much higher spec at this price point. For £600, Decathlon's own-brand Triban has an aluminium frame with a carbon-bladed fork and 10-speed 105 groupset, robust Mavic Aksium wheelset and saves a bit of weight too.





Specification

Frameset E5 aluminium.
Aluminium forks
Gears Shimano Claris 2400 11-32 8-speed
Chainset Shimano Claris 50-34t
Brakes Unbranded
Wheels Axis Classic
Tyres Specialized Espoir Sport 25mm
Bar Specialized shallow drop alloy
Stem Specialized alloy
Saddle Body Geometry Toupé Sport
Seatpost Specialized Sport alloy, 27.2mm
Size range 49, 52, 54, 56, 58, 61cm
Weight 10.12kg/22.3lb (without pedals)



Unbranded calipers are weak and underwhelming

but I would rather they be heavy and durable than light and flimsy. The 25mm Espoir tyres deserve a mention too. They really impressed me, being among the best tyres I have encountered on bikes in this price range, with good puncture protection and grip.

Riding

The frame is excellent. At this price point, we often suggest you should look for a carbon fork, as it can reduce front-end vibration and improve handling. Despite the fork on the Allez being aluminium, it is surprisingly comfortable and the frame feels stiff.

Handling inspires confidence; the Allez is exciting to ride for such a low-end road bike. Specialized clearly knows what it is doing when it comes to aluminium frames.

The gear changes are very clunky, as a result of the eight-speed mechanism and the large range of ratios. When changing through the 11-32 Claris cassette, it can feel like you are dropping a bag of spanners off a cliff as the chain drops from one gear to the next. The unbranded brakes feel weak too. They will stop you, but the difference in stopping power between these and a pair of Shimano 105 calipers is astounding, to such an extent that brakes would be the first upgrade I would suggest. Fortunately, the quality frame makes up for them.

SPECIFICATION LEVEL	15/20
BUILD QUALITY	15/20
ROAD HANDLING	16/20
RIDE COMFORT	15/20
VALUE FOR MONEY	14/20
OVERALL RATING	75/100

Merida Reacto 400 £1,150

Aero features, aggressive looks and a fast ride

An aero road bike is a compromise between a standard road bike and a bike built solely for straight-line speed.

The Reacto 400 sits in the middle of Taiwanese company Merida's three-bike aluminium aero range, aimed at those wanting to travel faster. The lower-specced Reacto 300 model comes in at a price point to appeal to those using the Cycle to Work scheme, while there is also a higher-priced model equipped with Ultegra, before Merida's aero range switches to carbon fibre for its higher-end frames.

Frameset

Just from looking at the shape of the frame, it is clear the Reacto 400 is definitely built for speed, and with the distinctive Lampre-Merida colours, it has a pro look combined with an aggressive appearance.

The frame is made of high-strength aluminium, while the forks are carbon fibre. The Reacto 400 comes with an aero carbon seatpost that has an internal clamp which Merida claims "efficiently minimises turbulences at the top end of the seat tube and thereby saves important power reserves".

Another thing that gives the bike a fast look is the internally routed cables, which should also help to reduce air resistance and drag. Although the welds are smoothed somewhat, they are not so clean as to be invisible.

Components

Impressively for a bike that has an RRP of just over £1,000, the Reacto 400 comes largely equipped with Shimano 105 11-speed, a good mid-range groupset that is by no means the norm at this price.

However, as is often the case, you'll find a mix of other brands completing the component line-up on the bike. FSA provides the 52-36t chainset and chain, while the stem and handlebars are Controltech One, and the brakes are Merida's own brand.

Following the aero bike trend, the rear brake is situated below the bottom bracket, where it's out of the airflow, rather than in the traditional position at the top of the seatstays. The front brake is traditionally placed, and neither brake is direct-mount.

Wheels

The wheels are nothing to write home about, but they do roll quickly and feel fairly responsive. Rims are Merida's own Aero 30s, which as you might expect from the name are 30mm-deep — quite shallow for an aero wheelset. To reflect the Reacto 400's aggressive aero

design and improve its aerodynamics, a pair of 50mm-deep rims could be a suitable upgrade.

The Maxxis Dolemites 23 foldable tyres look a bit out of place on what is otherwise a bike built for speed. They've got a herringbone grip pattern and look cheaply finished.

Riding

One of the main criticisms often directed at aero bikes is that they are far less comfortable than a normal road bike, often due to the extra material needed to make an aero-profiled tube robust. I did not find the Merida's ride overly harsh, probably due in part to the inclusion of a carbon seatpost.

As you'd expect from an aero frame, it feels quick on the flat and downhill, without having to really

Specification

Frameset Reacto Lite

alloy, Reacto carbon race fork

Gears Shimano 105 11-28t

Chainset FSA Gossamer 52-36t MegaExo

Brakes Merida Road Pro / Reacto

Wheels Merida Aero 30

Tyres Maxxis Dolemites 23mm

Handlebar Genesis Road Compact alloy

Stem Controltech ONE-5

Saddle Merida Race 1

Seatpost

Reacto Aero carbon Comp

Size range 47-59cm

Weight 9.72kg / 21.42lb (without pedals)





Pro team-liveried aero frame screams speed

hammer the pedals. For a bike made for straight-line speed and weighing in at almost 10kg, it also climbs well. In short, if you are riding on flat and undulating terrain, the bike performs well but if you plan to ride up many large hills you may want to consider a lighter steed.

If you are looking for a bike that cuts through the air and follows modern aero trends but don't want to break the bank, then the Reacto 400 could be the bike for you.

SPECIFICATION LEVEL	16/20
BUILD QUALITY	16/20
ROAD HANDLING	17/20
RIDE COMFORT	15/20
VALUE FOR MONEY	17/20
OVERALL RATING	81 /100

DOWNGRADE

Merida Reacto 300 £999.99

The Merida Reacto 300 comes with Shimano's 10-speed Tiagra groupset rather than 11-speed 105, but most of the rest of the spec and the frame are the same. The downgrades put the bike below the £1,000 Cycle to Work scheme limit, meaning it can be bought tax-free.



Reacto 300: wind-cheating tech for under a grand

Trek Emonda ALR 6 £1,700

Metal version of American firm's carbon dream bike

The carbon version of the Trek Emonda really grabbed the headlines when it was launched just before last year's Tour de France. Hitting the scales at only 690g, it was at the time the world's lightest production bike. The Emonda ALR transfers Trek's lightweight vision for the carbon Emonda to a range of aluminium bikes. Trek already offers aluminium versions of its other road bikes, the Madone and Domane, and the Emonda ALR looks to offer a similarly attractive mix of good performance and sharp pricing.

Frameset

An aluminium frame weighing 1,050g is sure to be an eye-catcher. Indeed, I don't think you can get a lighter aluminium frame for the money. The frame uses Trek's Invisible Weld Technology, which provides a stronger join between the tubes, and gives the frame a much cleaner look than the messy welds of some other aluminium frames.

The frame is DuoTrap-compatible, which means that you can buy a speed and cadence sensor (for £39.99) which can be integrated into the chainstay, sending data to your cycle computer, and getting rid of the need to attach a separate unit with unsightly zip-ties.

Components

This top-level Emonda ALR comes with a complete Shimano Ultegra

mechanical groupset (including brakes), which is, as always, difficult to fault. The quality and precision of the shifting is pretty much on the same level as Shimano's top-of-the-range Dura-Ace groupset, with the only real difference being the slight weight penalty.

As with the Merida, the finishing kit is largely aluminium, with the exception of the carbon seatpost — an upgrade from the alloy post on the Emonda ALR 5 — which greatly improves ride comfort.

Wheelset

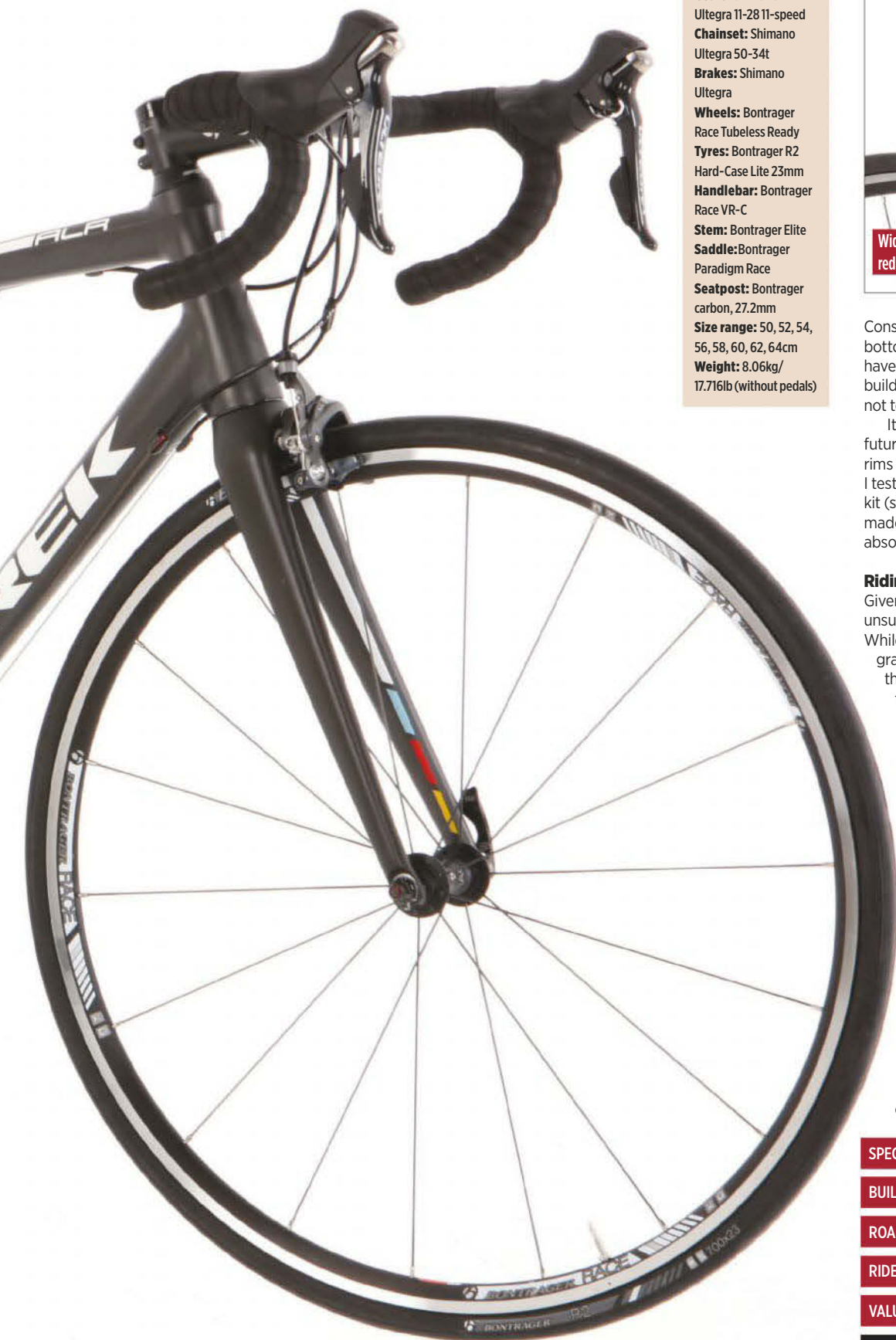
As with all Treks, the Emonda ALR 6 comes with an own-brand Bontrager wheelset, with this pair of 'Race' wheels perhaps being best described as workmanlike.

THE CARBON ALTERNATIVE

Trek Emonda S6 £1,800

With Trek's Emonda carbon range reaching down to a similar price range to the ALR, a carbon frame is a real alternative. The similarly specced Emonda S6 costs £100 more than the ALR 6, although the weight saving from switching to carbon may not be huge.





Specification

Frameset: Ultralight 300 Series Alpha Aluminium, full carbon tapered steerer fork
Gears: Shimano Ultegra 11-28 11-speed
Chainset: Shimano Ultegra 50-34t
Brakes: Shimano Ultegra
Wheels: Bontrager Race Tubeless Ready
Tyres: Bontrager R2 Hard-Case Lite 23mm
Handlebar: Bontrager Race VR-C
Stem: Bontrager Elite
Saddle: Bontrager Paradigm Race
Seatpost: Bontrager carbon, 27.2mm
Size range: 50, 52, 54, 56, 58, 60, 62, 64cm
Weight: 8.06kg/17.716lb (without pedals)



Wider tyres would reduce road buzz

Considering these hoops sit at the bottom of Bontrager's wheel range, and have been chosen primarily to keep the build cost down, the 1,700g weight is not too bad.

It's also good to see Bontrager future-proofing its wheels, with these rims coming as tubeless-ready. Indeed, I tested Bontrager's Tubeless conversion kit (sold separately for £139.99), which made setting up tyres to run tubeless an absolute doddle.

Riding

Given its weight, the Emonda ALR is unsurprisingly most at home in the hills. While 8kg may not be super-light in the grand scheme of things, it's still more than good enough to enable this bike to devour steeper gradients with the ease of a true climber's bike.

Coming down the other side is just as much fun, and although the fairly relaxed geometry encourages an upright position, it is easy enough to lower your upper body and sweep gracefully through the corners with assured handling.

The one downside is that you feel a little more of the road than you might like, even with the inclusion of a carbon seatpost. Indeed, if I were buying this bike, the first thing I'd do would be to fit wider, 25mm tyres which should provide a bit more protection from rough road surfaces compared to the 23mm set that come as standard.

SPECIFICATION LEVEL	18/20
BUILD QUALITY	18/20
ROAD HANDLING	18/20
RIDE COMFORT	16/20
VALUE FOR MONEY	17/20
OVERALL RATING	87 /100

Aluminium is here to stay

These three bikes really show just how rich the aluminium bike landscape still is, despite the encroachment of carbon frames at all but the lowest price points.

Although it has a basic design and spec, the Allez provides a good quality ride and feels robust — key factors to keep you on the move on the UK's country lanes and larger roads. There's the gear range to approach any ride with confidence and get you up the hills despite the bike's weight. Basic components are the norm at this price point and although eight speeds may seem meagre by modern standards, it's not long since Eddy Merckx was putting in astonishing performances in Grand Tours on a five-speed freewheel.

Spend a little more and the aluminium options open out. At just over £1,000, the Merida Reacto 400 provides a genuine aluminium alternative, for those looking for an aero bike with a modern design at an attractive price. The design looks aggressively aero and the Lampre colours give the bike a real pro feel. Although the ride and handling don't quite live up to the expectations its looks generate, for a bike at this price point, it's a great option, if marred a little by its high overall weight.

The Emonda is a serious competitor in the lightweight climber's bike sweepstakes. At 8kg, although not flyweight, its weight outcompetes many carbon bikes. The low weight comes not at the expense of handling or frame rigidity either, with the latter being, if anything, more than is called for on the UK's broken road surfaces.

None of these bikes suffers from

poor build, with clean welds and quality finish in all three, although inevitably the higher-priced models have more of a polished feel than the Specialized. In fact, it takes more than a glance to distinguish them from their carbon relatives.

Plenty to offer

At three times the price of the Specialized, the Trek inevitably wins on component spec, with a quality Ultegra groupset, carbon seatpost and adequately light wheels. The Merida is also no slouch on the component front, with 105 not really being far behind Ultegra in feel and functionality, and the carbon seatpost helping alleviate road vibration. Claris may not be exciting, but it works, and despite the lack of carbon bits the Allez's ride is comfortable.

It's easy to dismiss aluminium as a material whose time has passed, but there's life in the old metal yet. Choose wisely and even in the entry-level category you'll get a machine that you can ride with confidence; if you're looking for an aero bike or a climber's bike, the aluminium alternative to carbon bears investigation, as it

will usually carry a lower price tag.

Remember, the big brands are still backing aluminium. Although the Allez is the cheapest in Specialized's road bike range, spend a lot more and you can buy an aluminium-framed Allez S-Works. With a full Shimano Dura-Ace Di2 groupset and carbon wheels with ceramic bearings, it will set you back a cool £7,500. Reports of the death of aluminium have been greatly exaggerated.

“Choose wisely and you will get a machine that you can ride with confidence”



SPECIALIZED ALLEZ £600



75/100

Spot-on...

- Good frame
- Nice paintwork
- Comfortable ride

Near-miss

- Low spec groupset
- Heavy overall weight

MERIDA REACTO 400 £1,150



81/100

Spot-on...

- Aero looks and features
- Carbon seatpost
- 105 groupset

Near-miss

- Quite heavy
- Nondescript wheels and tyres

TREK EMONDA ALR 6 £1,700



87/100

Spot-on...

- Quality groupset
- Light frame
- Beautifully finished

Near-miss

- Slightly harsh ride
- Wheels are a bit heavy



7 OF THE BEST

Handlebar tape

Whether you're looking to smarten up your steed or simply add a little comfort, new bar tape is always a good place to start. Here's our selection of seven for your delectation

Words Oliver Bridgewood

Summer is here, so why not rip off your tatty bar tape and replace it with a fresh new wrap to spruce up your bike? As well as its aesthetic appeal, bar tape is also highly functional, being one of the main points of contact on your bike.

There is a huge amount of choice when it comes to bar tape. Some have a smooth finish and others are super-grippy. Bar tape with thicker padding can significantly increase comfort too, especially if you often ride on rough roads. And some bar tape just looks really cool!

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Colour or pattern

Bar tape is an excellent way to add some fun and personality to your bike without spending a fortune. With a huge range of colours and patterns available, you can easily make your bike stand out from the crowd. The usual approach is to coordinate the colour of the tape with the saddle, but don't let that hold you back. White may be fashionable, but black does a better job of hiding the inevitable build-up of dirt.

Texture and thickness

Many different textures are available from very thin fabric, to cork, simulated leather and rubberised finishes. Some tapes are thicker with more padding, which is great for reducing vibration and increasing comfort, though it does give a very slight weight penalty. Consider the surface texture too when picking tape. Some tapes are much easier to scrub clean than others, so they will look smarter for longer.

Stoppers and finishing tapes

Bar tape often comes with stoppers and finishing tape, though these vary in quality with some performing much better than others. Bar ends can be the screw-in type, typically on more expensive tapes, or just push-in bungs, which can be prone to falling out. Some of the finishing tapes don't work very well, but can be easily substituted with good old black electrical tape.



Supacaz £27.95

Supacaz is available in lots of edgy neon colours and can really suit those going for the Euro-fluoro look on their steed. And for anyone wanting a subtler look there is a black option too.

The tape wraps well, helped by a small amount of stretch and high quality finishing tape that is really effective. The finish is smooth, meaning

that this tape is slippery when wet. Comfort is excellent with Supacaz providing a decent degree of vibration dampening.

A very comfortable tape that is available in an array of eye-catching colours



www.silverfish-uk.com



ProLogo One Touch £20.99

One Touch is made from Polygrip, which is designed to give a secure grip in all weather conditions. It certainly feels grippy when wet and is really comfy too. The down side is that it tears easily so can't be reused. The tape looks good, especially when combined with a Prologo saddle with some cool colour combinations that you may recognise from some

pro team bikes. The bar bungs work well, but the finishing tape is not as good as standard black electrical tape.

Use of logos may not be to everyone's tastes, but look great with the right saddle



www.i-ride.co.uk



Fizik Superlight Classic £14.99

Featuring perforations, the Fizik Superlight has a classic style and seems to look great on any bike. This is thanks in part to the enormous range of colours, patterns and finishes that the Italian brand offers. There are too many to list, so it's best to take a look at the website. At £14.99 this tape is great value. The matt tape on

test wrapped OK, but is not the stretchiest out there — a little more stretch would make fitting easier.

Classic looks, good quality and a huge range of colours to match every bike



www.extrauk.co.uk



Lizard Skins DSP 2.5mm £27.99

This tape may be expensive, but if you have never tried Lizard Skins DSP tape we strongly urge you to. It wraps really well, the finishing tape works superbly and we have fallen head over heels with the way this tape feels on the bars, to such an extent that we often choose to ride without mitts. It is hardwearing, easy to wipe

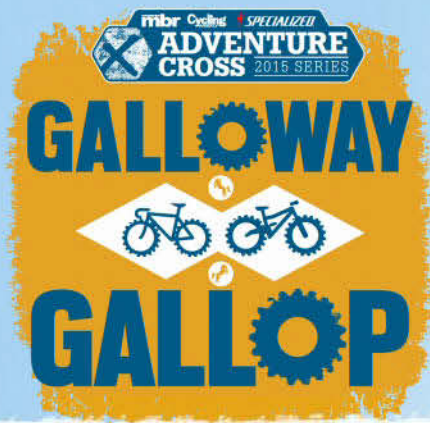
clean and can be rewrapped if required, which helps further justify the high price.

The best bar tape we have ever used. Expensive but you get what you pay for



www.2pure.co.uk





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Profile Design £9.99

At just £9.99 the Profile Design tape represents great value. It comes in the cork style, but is actually synthetic to make it more durable. With no adhesive strip on the back, wrapping can be a bit of a fiddle, but the upside is that there is no sticky residue left on the bars after you remove it. We found that it was quite easy to tear the tape, so take

care when wrapping it tightly. Also bear in mind that the texture means it is not the easiest to clean. **7**

Buy cheap, buy twice rings true here. This tape can be torn and is difficult to keep clean

www.nadison.co.uk



Fabric Knurl £17.99

The quality of this tape is excellent, with a good level of padding, courtesy of a substantial silicone adhesive layer on the reverse side of this 2.5mm foam-backed tape. Knurled rubber provides excellent grip whatever the weather, and the tape is designed to be durable. We wrapped and then unwrapped it and can confirm you could

potentially reuse it, a useful option when you consider how easily the rubber surface wipes clean. The screw-in bar bungs ensure a secure fit. **8**

Great value when you consider the high quality of the product

www.cyclingsportsgroup.co.uk



Radial Grippy £9.99

The Radial Grippy bar tape is the best on a budget and isn't far off being the best on test, either. The only real drawback is a lack of colour options but at £9.99, you can't go too far wrong. It was very easy to apply, benefiting from its stretchy PU base, which allows for either a thicker, more comfortable feel or a thin wrap;

ideal for those with smaller hands. The rubber style tape also remains grippy in the wet, making it good for all seasons. **9**

Very easy to apply and grippy in both wet and dry conditions

www.radialcycles.co.uk



**CYCLING
ACTIVE
BEST ON A
BUDGET**

VERDICT

There are many different companies all pitching for their slice of the bar tape market and we think it's great that manufacturers are pushing the boundaries in terms of technology and colour options. It isn't quite 'you get what you pay for', though, especially as Radial impress with its Grippy tape at just £9.99. Supacaz pitches closely to Lizard Skins, which, as we discovered in this test, is the cream of the crop when it comes to tape, with the best all-round performance and choice. Prologo, Fizik and Fabric all do a sterling job too and are worthwhile purchases if the likes of Supercarz and Lizard Skins are out of your price range.



Aero superbikes

Two top-of-the-range aerodynamic machines go head-to-head

Words Oliver Bridgewood Pictures Chris Catchpole

Aero features

Hidden integrated brakes and bladed handlebars lower drag

Geometry

Aggressive, designed for typically low racing riding positions

Boardman Elite Air 9.8
£4,999.99



If you are in the market for a new road bike and are fortunate to have a budget that is towards the higher end of the market, you are currently presented with a choice: whether to go for a traditional road bike or an aero bike.

For the best part of a century, the only thing cyclists were interested in was shedding weight from their bikes. However, in the last few years a debate has begun to rage: aero or lightweight?

Aero bikes first appeared in the early 2000s when Cervélo introduced its iconic 'Soloist'. Since then they have become increasingly popular and are often seen in the pro ranks, where marginal speed gains can make all the difference.

For this test we pitted two, top-of-the-range aero road bikes against each other, Cervélo's S5 and the Boardman Air 9.8.

Is this the bike for me?

Before we get to the bike test, the big question is whether an aero bike is worthwhile. As such, we performed an experiment to see if the average rider can benefit from riding an aerodynamic bike.

Bike manufacturers often claim that aero road bikes are significantly faster than standard bikes, but these claims are often made when riding at speeds of 45kph. This may be easy for a professional rider to do, but for us mere mortals it is less achievable. And so that considered, is there still a benefit to riding an aero bike if you are just a club level cyclist?

To test this, we rode the Cervélo S5 and a standard road bike around a velodrome. We rode both bikes for 10 minutes at a set power of 200 watts and measured the distance each bike travelled. The result was that the aero bike was significantly faster, travelling at 32.6kph, whereas the standard bike averaged 30.9kph.

We tested both bikes at 200 watts as we consider this a decent power output that is achievable for the average club cyclist or sportive rider. The Cervélo S5 travelled 5,425m, while the standard road bike with shallow wheels travelled 5,150m.

The result shows that you don't have to be a pro to benefit from the increased aerodynamics of an aero road bike set-up. Over speeds of 10mph, aerodynamics become significant.

However, it is important to also consider other factors in aerodynamics, firstly the bike's geometry. Understandably, aero bikes tend to feature frames that are designed for equally aerodynamic riding positions. Think Sir Bradley Wiggins with his perfectly flat back. With this in mind, if you are new to the sport, or not particularly flexible, an endurance bike or something with a shorter top tube and higher front end may be more suitable, as this will allow for a more relaxed position.

Comfort should also be considered. In the pursuit of speed and aerodynamics, aero bikes are often less compliant and comfortable than standard road bikes due to their compromised tube shapes. A bumpy and less comfortable ride can be energy-sapping over long distances.

There is often a slight weight penalty, too. You could expect a road bike at a similar price to be roughly 1kg lighter than its aero counterpart. This is significant and will make a substantial difference on long hills. If you regularly ride up big climbs, a lighter, standard road bike could be a better option.

Cervélo S5,
£7,299

£4,500 upwards What to expect

- A top spec, professional standard carbon frame
- Deep section clincher wheels
— aluminium rim with a carbon fairing
- A top-level groupset; SRAM Red, Shimano Dura-Ace, Campagnolo Super Record

Comfort

Aero bikes are typically less comfortable, with a harsher ride owing to their aero tube shapes

Deep wheels

Increased aerodynamics through deep section wheels. They really hold their speed



Boardman Elite Air 9.8 £4,999.99

A full-on speed machine that's aero from any angle

It may not be represented in the pro peloton, but the Boardman certainly has plenty of racing pedigree worth shouting about. You may recognise this bike as being the weapon of choice for the Olympic champion triathlete Alistair Brownlee and his bronze medal winning brother Jonny. For the last five years the Brownlees have dominated their sport while riding the Boardman Air.

Frameset

The Air 9.8 is Boardman's top-level frame, part of its Elite Series. It features an ultra light, full unidirectional carbon-fibre monocoque frame, internal cable routing and press-fit PF30 bottom bracket. Boardman has taken many of its design cues for this model from time trial bikes, including integrated brakes, bladed forks and narrow tube profiles, all designed to help cheat the wind and minimise drag. The down tube has a startlingly narrow horizontal cross-section when looked at from above.

The rear brake is placed on the bottom bracket out of the wind, and the front brake is integrated into the bladed aero fork. As such, when viewed directly from the front or rear, the 9.8 Air is strikingly thin.

The Boardman's integrated aero seatpost has a four-position clamp, allowing its angle to be changed to move the saddle fore and aft, effectively changing the seat tube angle between 73 and 75 degrees. This allows great flexibility for you to set up your optimal riding position depending on how far over the bottom bracket you want to sit. It may not have a UCI sticker, sanctioning it for use in the Tour de France, but that won't be a problem for most of us.

Components

The 9.8 Air's drivetrain operates by mechanical shifting and this is reflected in the lower price, relative to the Cervélo S5. SRAM Red is the American brand's top-tier groupset, offering excellent quality and is also the lightest commercially available groupset. That said, in my experience, the front derailleur is a bit of a fiddle to set up and requires fairly regular tinkering to maintain perfect shifting.

The 'WiFi' SRAM Red rear derailleur is especially useful because it allows for a big 32t rear cassette to be fitted, if you

Frame-routed cables smooth the profile of the carbon frame



"The Boardman cries out to be ridden fast"

have some hilly adventures planned. If you wanted to do this on the Cervélo S5 you would need to buy an additional Ultegra rear derailleur. The brakes are TRP, with the front being integrated into the front fork and the rear brake mounted on the bottom bracket.

Befitting the sleek performance-orientated design, the chainset is a full-on racing 53-39 combination, allowing for higher top speeds than the 50-34 compact ratio found on most bikes. The Fizik Arione saddle is top quality as are the Zipp Service Course bars and stem.

Wheels

The Zipp 60 consists of an alloy rim/braking surface, with a drag-reducing carbon fairing stuck on. The wheels are 58mm deep and feature Zipp's classic 'toroidal' cross section with a dimpled surface, a design that Zipp has proved in the wind tunnel to be aerodynamic in both headwinds and crosswinds.

These hoops really come alive at high speeds of over 40kph. However, despite their looks, they are not the stiffest wheels we have tested, and there was some brake rub when riding hard out of the saddle on steep climbs. The carbon fairing design also adds weight (the wheels weigh 1,820g a pair), making them less adept at climbing, and better suited to the flat.

Riding

A thoroughbred racer, the Boardman cries out to be ridden fast, with a very low front end that demands you adopt a low, aggressive position.

Deep wheels can often feel like a sail in crosswinds, with sudden gusts running the risk of catching you off guard. But, thanks to the Zipp's toroidal



Integrated seatpost

cross-section, crosswind stability was very good.

The front brake is clearly aerodynamic, but it is noticeably less powerful than the excellent Dura-Ace caliper found on the Cervélo S5 — adjustment and quick-release is inferior to the Shimano brakes. Similarly, the rear TRP caliper feels spongy in comparison to the Dura-Ace equivalent.

Braking inadequacies aside, the frame is very stiff and impressively light weight for an aero bike. Some flex, however, was detected in the handlebars and stem when really gunning it.

If you are after an out-and-out race machine, this is a great option. If you are coming from a sportive machine or steel-framed bike, the Boardman may feel harsh owing to its rigidity.

Specification

Frameset
High-modulus T700 HM-UD carbon frame and fork
Gears SRAM Red
Chainset SRAM Red 53/39t
Brakes TRP Aero V-brakes
Wheels Zipp 60
Tyres Continental GP4000 23mm
Bar/stem Zipp Service Course SL80 alloy/
Zipp Service Course
Saddle Fizik Arione titanium rail
Seatpost Boardman Air Carbon aero
Weight 7.65kg /17.52lb (without pedals)
Size range: XS to XL

UPGRADE

- The SRAM WiFi rear mech gives you the option to swap in a big ratio 32t cassette if required.
- Some full carbon wheels, such as Zipp 404 Firecrests, would turn this into a pro-level machine.

SPECIFICATION LEVEL	18/20
BUILD QUALITY	17/20
ROAD HANDLING	18/20
RIDE COMFORT	16/20
VALUE FOR MONEY	18/20
OVERALL RATING	87/100



SRAM Red: top flight groupset



Wind-cheating rear brake



Hide and sleek: the Elite Air 9.8 takes the stealth approach to speed

Cervélo S5 £7,299

A rapid machine, with the technology to boot

The Cervélo moniker is synonymous with high-end, ultra-light, aerodynamic road and TT bikes. The S5 is the top-end aero road bike from the Canadian brand. The Cervélo S5 is available in three different builds: Ultegra (£3,799), Dura-Ace (£5,599), and the top-of-the-range Dura-Ace Di2 version (£7,299) that we have here. This superbike is very similar to the one used by MTN-Qhubeka, One Pro Cycling and British Cycling, with the only difference being the wheels.

Frame

The S5 frame is all about aerodynamics, with special tube shapes and clever design features. Cervélo deliberately placed the rear brake in the conventional seatstay position, as this is far more practical and easier to maintain than a bottom bracket-mounted brake. The seatstays are sculpted to stick out slightly and shroud the rear brake, smoothing the airflow in the process.

No stone has been left unturned in the quest for aerodynamics — even the water bottle placement has been thought about. The down tube is cleverly shaped, so that a water bottle will complement the aero profile.

Possibly the most eye-catching aspect of the S5 is the aerodynamic handlebars. According to Cervélo's work with Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD), a bike's handlebars account for an astonishing 30 per cent of its total aerodynamic drag. The bladed bars on the S5 apparently save 4.4 watts compared to a standard set of round bars.

The bottom bracket is Cervélo's oversized BBright, which is designed to be light and very stiff.

Components

As you'd expect from a bike of this level (and price) there's Dura-Ace Di2 pretty much all round. The only exception is the chainset, which is a Rotor 3D. This is not a cost saving measure — Shimano doesn't currently make a chainset that fits the BBright bottom bracket, whereas the Rotor is specifically designed for it. The 52/36t chainrings are also a good choice for all types of riding, but you are losing a smaller gear when compared to a compact 50-34t.

UPGRADE

- 25mm tyres would increase comfort and help reduce some of the road buzz from the back end.
- A power meter, to aid with training and pacing.

Wheels

The top two builds of the S5 come with HED Jet 6 Plus wheels. Similar to the Zipp 60s, these feature an aluminium rim with a large 60mm-deep carbon fairing for aerodynamics. The HED Jets also feature a wide internal rim that allows the 23mm tyres to sit wider, like a 25mm tyre. This improves grip by increasing the contact patch of the tyre.

Riding

This bike is seriously quick. The feeling of speed is instantly tangible — when you take it out for a spin it immediately feels faster than a non-aero bike. Handling is good too; the front end is not quite as low as the Boardman Air 9.8, but the Cervélo has a longer reach, allowing you to sit over the bottom bracket without the need for a really long stem. The bike is well balanced and darts round corners like a gazelle evading a lion — an ideal race machine.

The feeling of speed is tangible — it instantly feels faster than a non-aero bike

However, the S5 isn't perfect.

Similar to a supercar, the integrated aero handlebar of this superbike may look sexy, but the reality is that it is not very comfortable in the hand or easy to live with. Good luck attaching your out-front computer mount, light or action cam.

On rough roads the S5 gave quite a harsh ride, too. The incredibly narrow aerofoil seatpost is certainly not conducive to comfort, with significant vibration. After some long rides on the pseudo cobbles that constitute many a poorly maintained Surrey lane I felt jaded. Get it on some smooth tarmac though and you wouldn't want to be on anything else. It's just a shame there are not many perfectly surfaced roads in the UK.

SPECIFICATION LEVEL	19/20
BUILD QUALITY	20/20
ROAD HANDLING	20/20
RIDE COMFORT	15/20
VALUE FOR MONEY	17/20
OVERALL RATING	91/100

Specification

Frameset: Cervélo S5 frame and All-Carbon, Tapered S5 Fork
Gears: Shimano Dura-Ace Di2 11 speed
Chainset: Shimano Dura-Ace Di2 11 speed, 11-25
Brakes: Shimano Dura-Ace
Wheels: HED Jet 6 Plus
Tyres: Continental Grand Prix, 23mm
Bars: Cervélo All-Carbon
Stem: Aero/FSA OS-99 CSI
Saddle: Fizik Antares
Seatpost: Cervélo Carbon, Aero
Weight: 7.25kg/15.98lb
Size range: 48 to 61cm





Aero bar is claimed to save 4.4 watts



Conventionally placed caliper is well shrouded



Seat tube deflects air round the wheel



The S5 looks fast standing still

Cervélo still sets the standard

At £7,300 the Cervélo S5 is significantly more expensive than the Boardman, especially when you consider that the £2,300 difference could potentially buy a whole other bike. So why buy the Cervélo?

Well, the Dura-Ace Di2 groupset is sublime. It is quite simply the best shifting currently available, and it is also really practical and easy to maintain. There is a little button on the junction box that you can press to re-index and tune your gears, making it almost idiot-proof.

Weighing in at 7.2kg, the S5 is 450g lighter than the Boardman in an equivalent size. This may not sound like much, but on steep climbs you can really feel it, and even on short ones. Both of these bikes are stunners, but the Cervélo does have the additional X-factor. Prop it up outside any cafe and other riders will stop to look at it. Ride it down the street and it turns heads, and not just from cyclists. Not many bikes do that.

The brakes on the S5 are far, far superior to the Boardman, not just in terms of power and modulation, but also practicality. The front brake is a fiddle, and the rear is more prone to getting caked in crud.

I did find the Boardman to be slightly more comfortable than the Cervélo, though. With regards to wheels, there is not much in it, with the Hed Jets and Zipp 60s being a similar specification.

Overall, the S5 is a better bike. The brakes are easy to maintain, it feels faster, Dura-Ace Di2 is easy to adjust and it weighs less. The lingering question: is it £2,300 better than the Boardman? Value is somewhat relative — depending on how much you crave and can afford the marginal gains — but we are in cutting-edge, superbike territory here, and to get the best, you have to pay a premium.

If you can justify the expense, get the Cervélo. The Boardman is still a great racing bike with a very high spec; just be conscious the geometry strongly suits those with an aggressive position. The take-home message is that, if you are riding above 10mph, there is an aero benefit from these bikes.

**CYCLING
ACTIVE
BEST BIKE
ON TEST**



BOARDMAN ELITE
AIR 9.8 £4,999.99



87 /100

Spot-on...

- Comfy and fast
- Overall high spec

Near miss

- Braking and calipers

CERVELO S5
£7,299



91 /100

Spot-on...

- Very light, very quick
- Sublime gear changes

Near miss

- Flat-top aero bars

3 OF THE BEST

Aero road helmets

Designed to keep you cool while also riding fast, *Oliver Bridgewood* puts three aerodynamic road helmets from major brands to the test

Words Oliver Bridgewood **Photos** Mike Prior

There's no doubt that 'aero' is the biggest buzzword in cycling right now. Here at *Cycling Active* we can barely move for products claiming to save you x number of watts or x number of seconds. Of course they can't all be true, but there's no doubt that one of the best places to look for that aero advantage is your helmet.

More and more aero road helmets have

made their way onto the market since Mark Cavendish won the 2011 World Championships with a plastic shell covering the vents of his Specialized Prevail helmet. However, prior to the last year or so, these had been designed purely with aerodynamics in mind — great until the temperature goes much above 10 degrees and your head feels like it's going to melt due to the lack of ventilation.

This has led to many manufacturers looking to find a happy middle ground with their aero road lids, producing helmets that still offer significant aerodynamic advantages over a standard lid, but without being so hot and unventilated that you'd rarely want to wear them.

So how do three offerings from big name brands shape up as aero all-rounders?

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Aerodynamics

Aside from protecting your head, the most important job for an aero helmet is to cut through the air with the greatest of ease. However, comfort is crucial too, so consider this alongside manufacturers' aero claims.



Ventilation

While ventilation naturally means compromising on aerodynamics, a completely non-ventilated helmet quickly becomes uncomfortable in any temperatures north of 10°C. All three of these helmets offer some sort of ventilation, with vents at the front to let in cool air, and so-called 'exhaust vents' at the rear to allow hot air to escape.



Adjustability

Not everyone has the same shaped head, and some people can find it difficult to find a helmet to fit. The key to this is for the helmet to have a good adjustment system, usually in the form of a dial, which can tighten or loosen the plastic inner shell at the rear, effectively changing the circumference of the helmet.



Kask Protone £195

One of the lightest aero helmets on the market at only 218g for a medium, the Protone is an impressively adjustable helmet that has been the choice of Team Sky for the last couple of years. Ventilation is good, if not on the level of the Giro, and my head got a little hot on summer rides. I was also disappointed by the overall

finish with the stickers beginning to peel after a couple of rides — certainly not befitting a helmet that will set you back nearly £200.

7

Adjustable and fashionable, but too hot and poorly finished



www.velobrands.co.uk

Mavic CXR Ultimate £150

Despite having 28 air vents — nine more than the Giro — I was a little disappointed with the ventilation on the Mavic helmet. The large piece of padding on the front of the helmet quickly became saturated with sweat on hot days and I also had a slight problem with the fit — the rounded shape didn't suit my head — so be sure to try before you buy! On the plus side, the lightweight retention

system performed well and was easy to adjust on the fly. It's not perfect but, at £50 less than the other two helmets, it's hard to ignore.

8

Not the best ventilation, but the price is good for an aero lid



www.mavic.co.uk

Giro Synthe £199.99

While both of the other helmets on test compromise on ventilation, this is not the case with the Giro. I found it just as comfortable as a standard helmet, even during hot rides. Giro claims the Synthe is almost as efficient as the fastest time trial helmets. The Roc Loc retention system is easy to adjust and provides

a good fit, while the helmet also looks great with a wide range of colours making it easy to match to kit.

9

Aero, well-ventilated, and comfortable — what more could you ask for?

**CYCLING
ACTIVE
GROUP TEST
WINNER**



www.giro.co.uk

VERDICT

Although I can't say which of these three helmets is the most aerodynamic, I'm certain which one I would buy. The Giro Synthe is the standout performer in this test. Ventilation is nothing short of superb and easily comparable to some of the best 'standard' helmets we've recently tested. Importantly, it also looks great and comes in a wide range of colours to match your kit.

The Kask Protone also scores well on adjustability with decent, if not outstanding, ventilation. However, for the £195 price tag I was a little disappointed with the rough finish. The price certainly wasn't the problem with the Mavic, which was also very adjustable, but let down by substandard ventilation.



AMORE E PASSIONE

Simon Smythe meets Colnago connoisseur Mike Thorogood to find out what exactly it is about the Italian brand that inspires such devotion — and how the Italian superbike is best set up

Words Simon Smythe Photos Chris Catchpole

A

t last year's Tour of Britain, Bradley Wiggins was asked to name his favourite bike of all time. "Colnago C40," he replied without hesitation. He is paid to ride Pinarellos and, as far as we know, has never ridden for a Colnago-sponsored team. So what exactly is the allure of the C40? How did Ernesto Colnago attain his godlike status? Why in the eyes of Colnago devotees is a Colnago a Colnago and the rest just bikes?

Mike Thorogood, 54, is a member of Kent's Sydenham Wheelers. Although he was a mechanic working for London bike shop owner Ken Bird for a

period during the 1970s and has raced and ridden bikes his whole life, he is not in the cycle industry. He chooses his bikes and pays for them out of his own pocket. Thorogood owns a Colnago C40, a Colnago C59 and a Colnago C60. We went to view his collection and asked him to explain Colnago's extraordinary attraction for him.

"When I got the C40 in 2003, I had actually gone to buy another steel frame," says Thorogood, who already owned a steel De Rosa — up to that point, his dream bike. "The person I was with said, 'You really ought to think about carbon.' I said, 'I don't know if I want it, I don't know if I trust it.' I came out having ordered the C40 and I've used it ever since.

"The C40 is from that early generation of carbon bikes and it was so ahead of its time. I bought it all those years ago and it's not a museum piece or something I just look at — it's been hammered, it's used — I've raced it at Crystal Palace, it's been in bike bags and on planes. It hasn't broken, the paint is still good — and I still feel good on it."

Colnagos are famous for their handling, as Thorogood confirms: "The C40 has quite a relaxed head angle and the handling is unbelievable. You go into corners and you know you're going to get round. It guides you round. The C40 is racier than the C59."

The Colnago C40 was introduced in 1993 — ‘C’ for carbon and 40 commemorating Colnago’s 40th year in business. The C40 wasn’t Colnago’s first carbon bike; in 1986 Colnago collaborated with Ferrari, the Milan Technical University and ATR, the company that was making carbon-fibre for Ferrari and other high-end automotive brands. But it was the C40 that was given to the Colnago-sponsored Mapei pro team, whose rider Franco Ballerini won Paris-Roubaix on it in 1995. With its viciously rough cobbled sectors, the Hell of the North was regarded as the ultimate proving ground for a bike. That was the moment carbon fibre truly arrived in the pro peloton.

Carbon revolution

The C40 was revolutionary in that Colnago didn’t simply bond round-profiled carbon tubes into aluminium lugs as was the way of making a carbon bike frame up until this point. Colnago created its own lugs in carbon fibre, producing a monocoque-like, all-carbon construction that was stronger, stiffer and more durable than earlier methods.

Revolutionary though this was, Colnago deliberately kept the C40 looking traditional: it was at first mistaken for aluminium when it was launched in professional racing, which

suited both team and manufacturer. Colnago also continued the now iconic Art Decor paint scheme that was originally introduced with the steel Master. This was a distinctive, elaborate and occasionally lurid combination of masking and airbrushing that was incredibly time-consuming and therefore highly prized. Because each frame was hand-painted, no two were exactly the same, even if they shared the same code in the Colnago catalogue.

Thorogood points to a tiny blue speck on the down tube of his C40. “It comes out how it comes out,” he says. “If the chap who’s doing it is having a bad day, that’s what you get. Here, you’ve got a bit of blue overspray — that’s so cool.

“There were pages of different finishes,” remembers Thorogood. “Now Colnago don’t do that. Generally it’s the set colours and that’s it. I looked through a catalogue and this was the scheme I liked — I think it was called NL30, and I still love it.”

Next, Thorogood bought a Colnago C50 Crono, which he sold when he stopped time trialling. “It was like riding the C40 but in a time trial position,” he says. “Colnagos are built to handle, no question about it.

“I regret getting rid of it,” he explains ruefully, “but I wanted to pack up racing and I knew if I didn’t get shot of it I

Below: Mike Thorogood has been hooked on Colnagos for 12 years



Above: Colnago’s unique carbon lugs were first seen on the C40

Below: The C60, like all the C models, is handmade in Cambiago



never would. Now I'm this close [holds thumb and forefinger together] to starting again."

Italian made

Like virtually all bicycle manufacturers, Colnago moved production to Taiwan, but crucially kept making the 'C' range — the lugged carbon design — in Cambiago. Now it's only the C60 and the reissued steel Master that are made in Italy. When we visited Colnago with sister magazine *Cycling Weekly* in 2011, we were not allowed to see production of the C59, at that time the new top-of-the-range lugged carbon frame. Perhaps it's this sort of secrecy, keeping its customers guessing and not letting in journalists, that helps Colnago to remain an enigma and to keep its customers coming back, model year after model year. At the same time Colnago infuses its Italian-made, top-line models with tradition, so that they are unmistakably Colnago. Could that be what keeps the devotees devoted — combining the excitement of a brand new model with the reassurance that it's at heart still a Colnago, handmade in Italy by artisans?

Thorogood thinks so. "With the C range, there are no gimmicks; it's classic — some people say a bit dated, a bit old-fashioned, but that's Colnago. Personally I think this is why Colnago hang on to making the C range in Italy


and farm the others out — because this is their jewel; they're very clever."

Thorogood ordered his C59 Italia in 2010, the year it was launched. "The C59 is fast but extremely comfortable. It seems the head tube is slightly longer and this makes a world of difference.

"When the weather gets decent, I ride this most of the time. I go to the coast and back — I'm doing 120 miles or so — and you get back at the end of it without aches and pains."

Thorogood builds all his bikes himself — Campagnolo, of course — and builds his own wheels. For the C59 he laced a pair of Ambrosio Nemesis tubular rims to Campagnolo Record hubs. The Nemesis rim, until recently, was ridden by almost the whole field at Paris-Roubaix. Its traditional aluminium box-section rim provided comfort and strength, while double eyelets ensured it could survive the worst beating.

"They're the best — so classic," says Thorogood. "It's just a shame Campag only make a 32-hole hub.

"I'm not a fan of braking on carbon rims," he continues. The Nemesis rims have Vittoria Pavé CGs — with classic Paris-Roubaix green strip — glued to them. "These are the best," says Thorogood. "It's true — you don't get as many punctures with tubs. I'm a tub man through and through." Thorogood weighs 70kg and runs six bar (87psi). 



Above: C59 Italia was Colnago's top race frame

Aaron Sullivan

The Colnago was built to be fast but also to have soul. It's not just a lesson in science and engineering, it's a lesson in passion like only the Italians can teach.

Steve Reeves

On a Colnago no ride is ever long enough.

Lito Vicencio

Understated and unassuming yet asserts its presence.

John Carter

Heritage and pedigree, huge number of pro wins, proven geometry, ride quality and comfort/handling, in-house manufacture for the top models, construction and finishing quality, longevity/resale value and 22 sizes for an ideal fit.

Cabon Oppy

Colnago is as any object of perfection: once you are taken, there is no other to compare.

Lee Nichols

I own all the 'C' range. They are faultless in their handling, stiffness, damping and overall experience. Plus they look so good. I have many bikes but my Colnagos are the ones I would never sell.

Istvan Szell

Colnago is Colnago, the rest of them are bikes.

Andy Notley

Four words: hand made in Italy.

Thorogood's top Colnago build tips

Catch it or wreck it

"All my bikes have got chain-catchers on, and I think, with the spread of gears these days that's a must," says Thorogood. "I've taken the paint off the bottom of the chainstay here [the C59], which I'm sad about, through not having a chain-catcher. When you've got 11 speeds, you tend to misuse the gears. You get caught in the wrong gear and you just flick it off onto the small ring instead of changing gear as you might have done years ago when you only had five gears. The tendency is for the chain to be thrown off, and it doesn't matter how good the mechanic, how well you've adjusted it, you could catch a bump in the road just at the wrong moment and you're pedalling to nowhere. The other thing is that with the width of down tubes now — look how close the C60's down tube is to the chain. It would make a grown man cry if that chain came off. Because what would you do? I could take the frame back to Colnago to get it repainted and it would probably cost a fortune and it could take two years to get it back because they're not going to rush — I know this for a fact."

Campagnolo: keep it clean

For Thorogood's three Colnagos there's only one groupset manufacturer. "It sounds crazy but Campagnolo gets better the longer you keep it," he says. "When you set up a Campag groupset, at first you're forever adjusting little things. But as it beds in, it's just so good. However, the main thing with gear systems these days is that you've just got to keep them clean. I think Campag recommend something like 500 miles out of a chain to a pro team. But when you're paying £40 for a chain, you can't do that, so you've got to keep it clean."

TA: ringing the changes

There are currently three industry-standard ratios: the racing chainset (53/39), the standard compact (50/34) and the semi-compact (52/36). Thorogood has devised a fourth variant: 50/39. "I went compact on the C59 and the C60. However, where we live [Kent], even with the hiding I give myself when we're out, I can get up any hill on a 39-tooth chainring. TA makes all the chainrings to fit compact chainsets, so I can get a 39 on a compact crank. I'm not a superman any more, so I've come away from the 53-tooth chainring. Now I use a 50-tooth outer and a 39 inner, and that does everything I want it to. But if I wanted to go to France and do a few cols, I could put the 34 back on.

"With the compact, everyone rides around on the big ring, crossing the chain. And with 11-speed chains, they're going to wear out. I still like to trundle along on the 39, you know, 13, 14, 15, and it's nice. A nice bit of cadence. But you see so many people lumbering along in the big ring [because the 34 ring is too small]. These TA rings are not pressed — they're machined and they're very accurate. So that Campag compact crank with the TA rings and the correct set of bolts is fabulous. You can mix and match for not a lot of money."

Right: Only the lucky get their hands on a C60 adorned with the famous clover logo

Colnago: the technician's view

Words Rohan Dubash

I don't remember the exact date but I do know it was on a balmy Sunday afternoon during the summer of 1982 that I saw one for the very first time, writes *Rohan Dubash*.

I used to live on the edge of the Peak District and had a regular training loop that took me over the Snake Pass and down into Glossop before grinding along the (always) windswept Woodhead Pass on the A628 and further on into Sheffield where I would often stop to take a breather and peer into the shop window of the local lightweight Mecca, Tony Butterworth's Cycles.

On this particular Sunday, I recall, Tony's window display included a line of new arrivals, each with a handwritten card attached, featuring a pithy comment from Tony along with the price. One frameset stood out immediately and I think it was that unmistakable cloverleaf head-badge superimposed over the diagonal World Championship bands that initially grabbed my attention. The card propped up in front of the forks read, "The stunning, new Colnago Mexico... £275 inc. headset" (!)

In a line-up that read like a Continental who's who, including the handiwork of Gios, Rossin, Guerciotti, Olmo, Pinarello, Vitus et al, it was a cream-coloured Colnago Mexico that became the object of my desire. At once I spotted the crimped top and down tubes that separated it from all the others and, as I cupped my hands around my eyes and peered closer, I could also make out a strange metal boss sticking out the side of the seat tube to mount the front derailleur (a feature that would be adopted by most of Colnago's compatriots in the following years) and a pair of slender, aerodynamically shaped seatstays running gracefully down to the chrome-plated rear dropouts that carried the Colnago name. My soul had been stirred, although I did not fully realise it at the time.

I had never heard of Colnago and neither had most of my mates but after much pontificating and in-depth conversation down at the clubroom, I decided to follow my gut instinct, take my hard-earned pennies to Tony's and make that Mexico mine. I must have had a real rush of blood to the head that day, as my wage packet from the bike shop I worked in did not go far, but I had been very careful over the last 12 months and had a little nest-egg tucked away. I blew the entire lot on the frame, a matching Colnago engraved headset, a Super Record seatpost and an FT Titanium bottom bracket.

I nervously assembled the Mexico over the next few days and used all the gear off my Ti Raleigh team replica bike to complete the project. The Mexico was my first taste of Italian steel and my first experience of the legendary Colnago ride. A lower bottom bracket than the outgoing Raleigh seemed to underpin the bike's inherent stability and the lustrous

paintwork and chrome plating really did make you feel like a king of the road in the Derbyshire sunshine.

In the last 33 years, I have owned five Colnagos, visited the factory on a couple of occasions, written a fair bit about the brand for various publications and sold dozens of Cambiago's finest to enthusiasts and people who are passionate about arguably one of the most innovative and iconic frame-makers of our time.

Over three decades, I came to appreciate his introduction of microfusion cast lugs, fork crowns and bottom bracket shells when most builders were still using pressed steel versions, his innovative manipulation of tubing profiles to improve on frame rigidity, the adoption of the 'straight' Precisa fork — a move that was criticised at the time of launch by some yet is commonly used by other frame builders now and a feature found on every Colnago today. The brave (at the time) decision to consider making frames from carbon-fibre was spurred on by Ernesto's friend Enzo Ferrari to adopt a material already used extensively in motorsport. This working relationship still bears influence on today's Colnagos.

The list of innovative work from the bike brand that carries that immediately recognisable cloverleaf logo is almost endless. A real pioneer, then, and someone prepared to follow his instincts and push the boundaries of performance.

Many owners appreciate the 'genetic connection' between one model and the next and riders of my generation can see traces of their old steel Colnagos of the Seventies and Eighties in the range-topping C60 available today. Lugs, while questioned by some, still offer a practical way of connecting the individual tubes together and provide a unique ride quality that cycling aficionados around the world have to come to love and cherish.

In my day job (www.doctord.co.uk) I see dozens of Colnagos entrusted to my care for anything from minor adjustments to major overhauls. My clients pick up on the relationship I have formed with this marque over the years, a relationship that is still alive and well and not set to change any time soon.

Colnago owners explain the brand's unique appeal:

Vernon Adams "From the first time I walked into Dauphin Sport and saw them in the flesh, I knew I wanted one. I'd previously seen them in magazines — photos of Saronni, etc. But it was only when I saw all the detail in the lugs and the quality of finish up close that I really appreciated them. My dad got one, then my brother had one too. They were amazing."

Neil Burningham "Every time I take my Colnago out for a ride, I feel like I'm setting off on a very special journey."

Charlie Whitfield "I saw a C40 on a Saturday ride and thought it was nice. I did a bit of research and learned that it was great. I watched footage of Roubaix in 1996 and had to have one. I own a two-wheeled [Ferrari] Dino; of course I'm happy about it!"

Simon Lewis "Ever since I first saw bike racing

and the Tour de France, aged 12, I always wanted a beautiful bike. Colnago always struck me as the bike that ticked all the boxes: beautiful, a great ride, stylish and full of heritage."

David Hunt "When you ride a Colnago, you think of all that heritage, all those past victories, and it stirs your soul. The superb handling and performance are just a bonus."

Jon Allan "It's the bike I wanted when I started cycling and I still haven't got one 35 years later. One day, though. Retirement present perhaps?"

Richard Michael Payn "Until you have owned one, it is difficult to put into words the reasons why they are so nice to ride. It was reading an article about building their frames in the mid 1980s that made me buy my first one, in 1986."

Kevin Hickman "It's the bike I always wanted and it just makes me smile every time I ride it come rain or shine."





Below: Dubash's C40 has a unique pre-production paint scheme that he requested himself

However, the C59 Italia frame itself doesn't get a perfect 10. "They possibly slipped up on the rear brake cable routing," says Thorogood. "Because there are no stops — the outer case goes all the way through — you get slipping... you get little vibrations and that's the only noise the bike makes. The C59 was the first of the C range to go internal."

Thorogood indicates the beautifully neat cable routing in front of the handlebar. "I've always had my brakes the Continental way," he says. "When I put my bikes together, I'm a bit fussy, so I always try to get names where they should be — the cable logos in front of the head tube facing outwards."

He is fastidious for good reason. "I'm not just a fussy person for the sake of it — I do ride the bikes — I put them together, I've raced, I'm not one for just looking at the thing."

Fast forward C60

Thorogood wanted a C60 as soon as they were launched. "I asked to get one and was told they were not taking orders. The day after Milan-San Remo last year, it was announced that Colnago were now taking orders."

"I put my order in on the Monday. [I was aware that] Colnago do not change their ways for anyone. You put your deposit down and it comes when it comes... but I got it within two months and I felt that was lucky."

Thorogood chose the modern version of Colnago's Art Decor paint scheme for the C60 Classic. I'm sure — just like with the C40 — if you got another C60 off the shelf you would find something slightly different if you looked hard enough," he says.

The C60 is fully kitted out with Campagnolo Super Record plus Thorogood's custom chainring combination of 50/39 using TA chainrings. However, he regrets buying the deep-section wheels: "They make the bike look very nice, but they don't do it any justice. With deep-section carbon rims you get a lot of noise, and you get valve noise. Trying to rectify it can be a problem [with a Miche valve magnet].

"It doesn't look that good, but with these wheels if you're on a fast descent you do get a pendulum effect [due to long valves and extenders] and sometimes it's unnerving. I'm going to keep these in case I do any club time trials and I'm going to build myself another set of wheels."

How does the C60 ride compared to the C59 and the C40?

"It's hard to tell people a bike's fast, because it's only as fast as the person who's getting it going. But I think with the C60 you've got to be fit to ride it. The bike wants to be pushed, yet it's got the comfort of all the others."

Finally, does Thorogood have a favourite Colnago? "You can't look at each one and say 'this one is the best' because each one is so good in its own right. All three of them are works of art, fabulous to ride, fabulous to own. Why would you want anything else?" **End**

ASK CYCLING ACTIVE

Welcome to Fitness Q&A, where our coaches and nutritionists are on hand to help you. Each month, we answer your queries, problems and dilemmas so you can enjoy your cycling worry-free. Send your questions to robert.hicks@timeinc.com

CA EXPERT



This month, Level 3 British Cycling coach Rob Mortlock answers your fitness questions

Help! My toes have gone numb

Q During the winter, my toes were going numb during long rides. I thought it was because I was cold, but it's still happening. Do you know what is going on and is there anything I can do to stop this unpleasant feeling from happening?
Robert Mills, Devon

A Numb toes can be caused by a number of things. It's thought that excessive pressure on the ball of the foot can restrict the circulation to the toes, making them go numb. The

first issue we'll talk about is a poorly fitting or tight shoe. Your shoes should be close-fitting but not too tight and not so loose that your foot is moving around inside them.

Be aware that your foot may swell and widen on very long rides. If the shoes are good, you can always try a custom insole. Typically, people with high arches will need specialist support, which can be achieved without resorting to buying new shoes and simply fitting new insoles with a metatarsal support designed to support the whole of the foot along its length and effectively remove the 'hot spot' of pressure.

Another common problem is cleat size and position. A poorly positioned cleat, especially on a flexible shoe, can cause real discomfort and pressure. Sometimes, even the angle of the cleat can create problems, which can be rectified with shims.

If cleat angle is a problem, it may be a better long-term solution to visit a bike-fitter. The fitter should be able to analyse your entire position and pedal stroke as well as the fine-tuning of your cleats.

Occasionally, a rider's pedalling action can cause issues, although this is usually correctable with attention to the bike's fit. You may also simply try wiggling the toes every so often on the ride to keep the circulation going.

It may be that one of the factors we've mentioned is responsible, or it could be a combination of a few. It's worth trying different things to eliminate the probable causes. See a doctor if the problem doesn't improve after ruling out those factors.

Uphill struggle

Q I've always struggled riding up hills. Shall I get a triple chainset or would you advise me to train harder? I do try, but it's not getting any easier.
Paul Casey, Exeter

A You are not alone. Many riders find climbing both frustrating and demoralising, especially when their 'mountain goat' type companions go shooting off into the distance on every gradient. So, for those of us who aren't natural climbers, what sort of things can we do to reduce the time we spend on the upward slog and get to the top a bit quicker?

The most effective change you can

make is to lose some weight, which rapidly reduces the amount of power you need to produce to convey yourself swiftly upward.

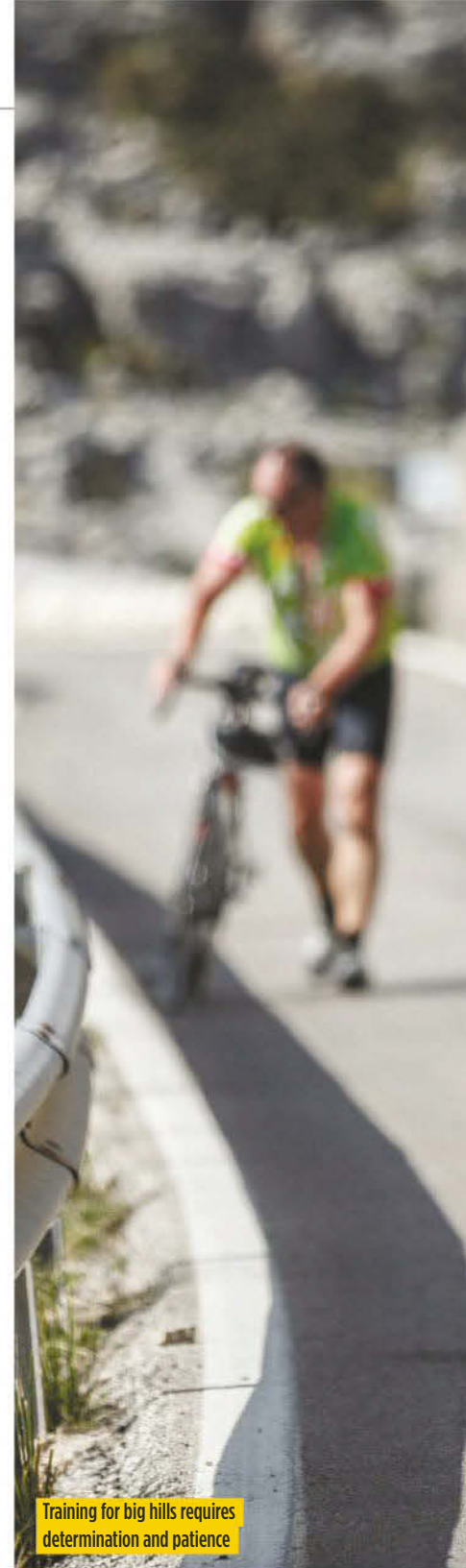
Although a triple chainset will give you a wider range of gearing, if you are mainly concerned with not having enough low gears for the hills, you may just get away with a change of cassette, provided your rear mech can accommodate a larger rear cog. Sometimes it's only another tooth or two extra that you need to ride back into the comfort zone of your cadence.

Training does usually help, but it's best to look for gradual improvements over a period of time rather than smashing yourself on big climbs and being too fatigued to ride a few days

Numb toes may be caused by ill-fitting cycling shoes



Training for big hills requires determination and patience





distributed around the muscles and aiding comfort. Try to remain mentally composed and relaxed, looking well ahead up the climb and knowing that you will be at the top soon. Pace your efforts on long climbs; try to start off slowly and build a rhythm, rather than going off hard and running out of energy before the summit.

How much is too much?

Q Is there such a thing as training too much? I feel good, but I'm worried that I might be overdoing it. Thoughts please.
Paul Becker, Hampton

A The short answer is yes! There is such a thing as training too much, and it's commonly known as overtraining. This can result in illness, loss of motivation and a significant decrease in performance, so although it's important to be able to recognise the signs early on, it's even better to know what to do to avoid it altogether.

The difference between training and mere activity is that training should have structure and follow a plan while monitoring your progress and general health. Unstructured activity has the advantage of ease and convenience, but can also carry the risks associated with overtraining. For training to be effective, you still need to have an amount of manageable overload, so how can we know that we are doing enough to train effectively without overdoing things and making ourselves ill into the bargain?

The most common causes of overtraining are riders pushing themselves to their limits, while ignoring the need for recovery and rest. Remember that the more intense the workout, the longer you will need to recover. Riding four to six times a week at a low to moderate intensity may not result in overtraining, but making the rides significantly harder while keeping volume the same would certainly increase the chances. Training should have adequate rest and recovery factored in, including recovery-paced short rides each week when you are training hard. Rest and recovery isn't just an addition to training — it's equally important as the workout itself.

Even if you don't train with a heart-rate monitor, it's worth checking your resting heart rate (RHR) each day. RHR is a great early warning system for fatigue and can help you avoid overtraining. You don't need to invest in a heart-rate monitor; there are free mobile apps that measure your heart rate by using the phone's camera. Your RHR should be taken at the same time each day (ideally just after you've woken up) and should remain fairly consistent. If you notice a significant rise in RHR, it could be time to put your feet up for the weekend.

later. Most experienced riders and coaches will say that to improve at something you need to practise it, and that's particularly true of hills. Most static trainers won't give the same feeling of riding up a steep incline with gravity working against you, so going out on the road with a positive attitude and tackling a few different hills will undoubtedly help.

It's also important to look into your riding technique and approach as well as the effort itself. On long climbs, you will see professional riders constantly changing their riding position. Riding out of the saddle, moving fore and aft on the saddle when seated and also changing hand positions on the bars are all good ways to keep the workload

CA recommends Torq Gel

Easy to open, tastes great and is packed full of carbohydrates and electrolytes. What more could you want from an energy gel?

Torq Gel, which contains only natural flavours and no artificial sweeteners, uses an optimal carbohydrate blend (2:1 maltodextrin and fructose) to enhance carbohydrate absorption. Each gel contains 28g of carbohydrates.

Unlike other gels, this one is light in texture, which makes it easy to consume. It's also refreshing — surprising, considering how sweet it is.

For more information, go to www.zyro.co.uk £1.55



8 ways to survive a hot ride

Summer is here and although we all look forward to riding in the sunshine, hot weather can bring its own challenges. This month we look at ways to stay comfortable when the heat is on

Words Hannah Reynolds Photo Jesse Wild

1 Sun cream

Cancer Research UK recommends that to be 'SunSmart' you should stay out of the sun between 11am and 3pm. If you know hot weather is coming it is a good idea to get your ride done early in the morning or late afternoon, but that's not necessarily practical if you are riding an event.

Choose a high-level sun protection, at least factor 15. A symbol with the letters



UVA inside a circle is a European symbol that indicates that the protection against UVA radiation is at least one third of the total SPF (Sun Protection Factor) value. Sun cream has a shelf life, so once opened use it within a year. Apply it before your ride and give it enough time to be absorbed. Apply a little under your sleeves and short legs and below the height of your socks so if your kit shifts around as you ride you don't leave unprotected skin exposed.

Research shows that most people don't apply enough cream. To get the level of protection stated on the bottle, you need to put enough on. For an average sized adult, you will need about two tablespoons to cover arms, legs, face, head and neck. Don't forget the backs of your hands as they catch a lot of rays when resting on the bars.

2 Clothing

Wearing the right kit can help keep you cool and protect your skin from the sun. Some lightweight summer kit gives its SPF on the label so if you are easily burnt it's worth investing in something that offers sun protection. However, be aware lots of jerseys and shorts feature mesh panels and that without sunscreen underneath you can burn

through these fabrics. Colour obviously plays a part — avoid black on the back of your jersey as when hunched over the bars it will really soak up the sun.

3 Hydration

In hot weather you sweat more when exercising so hydration becomes even more important than in the winter. Hydration starts even before you get on your bike, particularly if you are riding soon after breakfast — make sure you have drunk enough before you leave and your pee is a light straw colour. While taking on plenty of fluid during your ride is important, high sweat rates, particularly over the duration of a long ride, may mean you also need to take on electrolytes. Not everyone sweats the same amount and the composition of sweat can vary between individuals, but if you notice white streaks on your helmet straps, shorts or kit it is likely you are a 'salty sweater' so for you replacing electrolytes is even more important. Electrolytes in your drink help to maintain the balance of fluids in your body and help fluids to be absorbed more quickly.

4 Keep bottles cool

It goes without saying that on a hot day cold water is far more palatable than warm water that has been in your bottle for ages, but did you know cold water is also absorbed from your stomach quicker, or that drinking cold water can help lower core body temperature? The night before your ride fill your bottle half full and freeze overnight, top off with water in the morning. This will keep your bottles cool all the way through your ride.

5 Foods for hot weather

Food in your rear pocket in warm weather has a high risk of turning into a sticky mess and can be unappealing when warm. It's often better to get your carbs from an energy drink and gels, but if you still prefer solid foods stick to things that won't melt or squish. Bananas, dates, jelly babies and cereal bars are all good choices.

6 Lower your expectations

In hot weather your heart rate will be higher and your power will be lower at any given intensity. Don't get frustrated and push yourself harder if your numbers don't match your usual figures for the same ride. Instead, make allowances for the heat: if you are using a power meter for training, knock as much as 20 per cent off each zone so you aren't pushing yourself beyond your limits. Exercising hard in the heat can leave you more vulnerable to heat exhaustion.

7 Cool your pulse points

During exercise your core temperature rises and in hot weather it is hard to disperse this excess heat. Running cold water over your wrists and neck can help lower your body temperature. Pro cyclists use 'pre-cooling' ice chairs before events, resting their forearms in icy slush to help lower their core temperature in advance of competition.

Your riding position means that the back of your neck can be particularly exposed to the heat of the sun, making it both vulnerable to sunburn and to uncomfortable feelings of overheating. Keeping the sun off your face and neck with a buff or cap can help to prevent sunburn and if you dampen them with cold water it can also help to keep you cool. Pouring water down the back of your jersey and wetting your wrists can bring relief from the heat.

8 Acclimatisation

If you know you will be exercising in hot weather, for instance if you have entered an event in Europe where it is almost guaranteed to be very warm, it is worth putting aside time to acclimatise in advance. Turbo-training indoors without a fan will help simulate the type of heat you are likely to encounter abroad. If conditions are likely to be hot and humid try setting up your turbo in the bathroom with the shower running. It sounds a little bizarre but it will really help you get used to the conditions and improve your performance on the day. **End**



Drinks and gels beat solid foods in the hottest weather





cycling changed my life

Being diagnosed with Crohn's disease was the start of a devastating few years for Stuart Gourley but after surgery he started cycling and got his life back

Words Rebecca Charlton **Photos** Daniel Gould





With a number of high-profile athletes and TV personalities openly speaking in the press about the condition in recent years, we're all much more familiar with Crohn's disease. That's not to say there's not still some confusion around the condition, with the associated rapid weight loss often put down to poor diet or severe stomach pain being attributed to Irritable Bowl Syndrome (IBS). It's not uncommon for it to be misdiagnosed in the early stages. The truth is, this condition is chronic, potentially life threatening and currently incurable.

Professional cyclist Katie Curtis is living with Crohn's disease and during this year's Aviva Women's Tour the Pearl Izumi Sports Tours International rider was hospitalised when her illness flared up during the race. It highlighted once again the severity of Crohn's but also provided an inspiring example of a rider who's managed the condition while racing at the highest level.

It can be incredibly tough to lead a normal life if flare-ups become increasingly regular but for 30-year-old Stuart Gourley, surgery allowed him to begin rebuilding his life and cycling played an important part in his recovery.

Swindon-based customer care manager Stuart was diagnosed with Crohn's disease 17 years ago now, at the age of 13. "I got diagnosed with the auto-immune inflammatory bowel condition whereby sufferers often have to endure chronic pain and illness," he says.

"There is no cure as yet. Being diagnosed with this disease was a disaster to me at the time. I had big plans to be a pilot for the RAF and I had been a successful air cadet, having been awarded two flying scholarships and sponsorship. But unfortunately my diagnosis meant I couldn't join the RAF at all, or my second choice career of joining the police force.

Treatment

"For years I lived with this condition and made the most out of a bad situation. It wasn't all that bad. It wasn't great, but it could have been a lot worse, that's how I saw it, anyway. A side effect of the drugs and disease was that my weight fluctuated — my lowest being nine stone as a tall 15-year-old and, as the drug and steroid treatment continued, my weight eventually ballooned up to 24 stone at the age of 24.

"By this age I had started to run out of treatments that doctors could offer, I had been in and out of hospital as an inpatient on and off for almost three years and never really got back into remission. I had been on high doses of steroids, experimental drugs where I had to spend a day in hospital once a fortnight to be infused; I was on drugs that transplant patients take and doses of chemo to try to get me back into remission but none of this worked," explains Stuart.

Surgery

After 11 years of living with the disease, it came to the point where the doctors could do no more to improve the condition unless Stuart agreed to life-changing surgery, an ileostomy. This would involve a major operation during which the small intestine is diverted through an opening in the abdomen.

Ileostomy procedures are relatively common in the UK. In England, over 9,000 such operations are carried out each year and while many people find their quality of life significantly improves after this procedure, it's a big, not to mention difficult, decision to make.

"I could continue to manage plodding along, overweight, ill and not really getting anywhere, or I could face my worst nightmare — surgery. Losing my colon as a 24-year-old single chap and facing life with an ileostomy. It was not something I really wanted to be honest.

"I remember my mum telling me that she had done a lot of reading about people who had suffered like I had and how they had said that it was the best thing they had ever done. Naturally, as a 24-year-old male who would never listen to their mother, I remained unconvinced." ►►

I spent two weeks in hospital, possibly the worst two weeks of my life. My entire digestive system shut down for a couple of days and made me so ill that I still look back upon it as the darkest moment I have ever faced

Despite his doubts Stuart eventually decided it was the only option. "I remember turning up for surgery, and really not being sure up until the moment that I was put under that this was the right choice, but I went ahead and had the op done. No going back now!"

Things weren't straightforward and his recovery suffered some complications: "I spent two weeks in hospital, possibly the worst two weeks of my life. My entire digestive system shut down for a couple of days and made me so ill that I still look back upon it as the darkest moment I have ever faced."

But Stuart remained positive and resilient, as he had done throughout the illness. "I survived and came out the other side. Because I was so ill in hospital, I lost two stone in a week and gained a blood clot in my leg along with a 15-inch scar that runs from my torso down. Not a great start. This was in June and in the September a friend and I were off to Japan travelling.

Recovery

"After getting out of hospital I started to recover," continues Stuart. "I came off all of the drugs that I had been on for the first time in 11 years, and was totally drug-free. At my worst I was taking seven drugs."

Motivated to get fit enough to make it to Japan, Stuart looked to cycling for help.

"I needed to get fit to get back to work and make the trip so I was persuaded to buy a cheap mountain bike, which I did, and started pootling about and getting fit again. Before the surgery I might have ridden occasionally to college now and again but that would be it."

After two months Stuart returned to work and eventually made it to Japan. After the trip the cycling bug took over.

"When I returned I carried on cycling, I felt so much better and free of the weight that I hadn't realised I had been dragging for so long.

"A close friend eventually persuaded me to trade in my mtb and get a road bike and the weight continued to drop, and it kind of spiralled from there. Naturally I bought another bike, and another, and another.

A Ridley Noah, Boardman SLR 9.8 and a Cube CrossRace. Now I weigh 11 stone."

And it didn't stop there. Three years ago Stuart not only began racing but launched a development team, too.

"I worked up the categories as a racer and qualified as a British Cycling Level 3 road and TT coach and a Level 2 CX coach and launched Radeon Cycle Coaching. The team is looking for sponsors for next season to take us up to the next level and fund more national-level competitions. It's going well. We are currently fifth in the region with four wins, five seconds and over 20 top-10 placings as a team this year.

"We are now established as one of the best teams in the region, one I actively race with and we have clear aims and ambitions to take it to the next level in the coming years.

"I look back to what my mum said about the operation changing my life and my opposition to it. I can't believe how wrong I could have been and how right she turned out to be. But then I guess mothers are always right.

"Cycling has changed my life, it's saved me. I love riding and racing, but most of all I love coaching — helping riders to overcome their issues and to be the best they can be, whether they're riders wanting to be pros, riders wanting to complete their first 100-miler or kids in the local schools. I just love coaching."

End



Training in the colours of his development team



Cycling put Stuart back on the road to fitness



What is IBD?

Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) is a term mainly used to describe two conditions, ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease.

Both are chronic conditions that involve inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract and can lead to severe abdominal pain and a number of other acute symptoms that affect the digestive system.

IBD symptoms vary from person to person, most of whom will likely experience periods of good health (remission) and then relapses or 'flare-ups' when the symptoms get worse.

According to the NHS it is estimated that IBD affects about one person in every 250 in the UK. There are around 146,000 people with ulcerative colitis and 115,000 with Crohn's disease in the UK.

IBD is usually diagnosed in people in their late teens or early 20s, but can affect people of any age.

There isn't a cure at the moment but a lot can be done with medication and surgery to help keep symptoms under control and to reduce the chance of a flare-up.

Useful links:

www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk

www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Crohns-disease/Pages/Introduction.aspx



Picking up speed on his Boardman SLR 9.8

Energy bars

This month *Cycling Active* munches its way through seven of the best natural energy bars — strictly in the name of scientific research, you understand...

Words Robert Hicks

Putting the right stuff into your body gives you the energy you need to perform out on the road. Sometimes, on a long ride, energy gels and isotonic drinks can taste unpalatable and sickly — which calls for products with a more natural taste.

Energy gels, powders and bars may be the most commonly used and most practical way of replacing carbohydrate stores during a ride. But if you are riding a long sportive or need a healthier boost than a choccy bar once you've stepped off

the bike, natural energy bars are the way to go to add variety to your cycling diet.

Carbohydrate is the main source of energy during physical exercise. It is stored within the muscles as glycogen and its depletion is one of the main causes of fatigue. Experts suggest that 30-60g of carbohydrates per hour are required to maintain energy stores and performance. But beware, consuming any more than this during a ride won't increase performance and may do more harm than good.

Natural flavourings

More and more companies are looking to move away from creating products that are based around artificial flavourings. This has coincided with the rise of natural energy bars packed full of seeds, fruits and nuts. These not only lift your carbohydrate stores, but also give the body other nutritional benefits such as protein, minerals and fibre. However, it is important to try out what works for you in training so you can feel confident with it when it matters.



NEED TO KNOW

Riding for under 60 minutes

It isn't vital to take a natural energy bar with you for a ride of under an hour, as your body's carbohydrate stores should already be sufficient for the entire ride with just water or an energy drink to keep you hydrated.

Wash it down

Natural energy bars can sometimes be a bit tough to take on board if you're thirsty during a ride, so make sure you stay hydrated and save enough fluids to wash it down afterwards.

Carbohydrates

Space out eating natural energy bars, having energy gels in between. Despite looking and tasting very different to traditional energy bars, natural bars contain a similar number of calories, so make sure you don't overload.

Eat Natural bar 95p per bar

If you are after a proper nutty bar, look no further than Eat Natural's fruit and nut bar. The most stripped-back energy bar of the group is gluten-free and lives up to its name, containing no fewer than four different types of nut (almond, brazil, hazelnut and peanut), which are a great source of protein

and fibre. It's a little drier than the other bars in this test, but it certainly ticks all the boxes in terms nutrition.

7

A little bit dry but a nut enthusiast's dream bar

www.eatnatural.co.uk



Chia Charge flapjack £1.60 per bar

Having originated as a kitchen start-up, Chia Charge has taken chia seeds in a new direction and created these tasty flapjacks. Made in Yorkshire, the 80g bar is the biggest on our test and is probably a bit too much to eat while on the bike. But it's the perfect post-ride snack — just the thing to

have with your cafe stop cup of coffee. The flapjacks are available in two flavours: original (with sea salt flakes) and banana.

7

Quite large but full of carbs

www.chiacharge.co.uk



Nature Valley bar £2.69 for a box of five

Nature Valley's Oats & Honey bar is perhaps the most recognisable out of the group, as it's widely available in most supermarkets in a variety of flavours. Despite its commercial success, it doesn't offer as large a carbohydrate boost as the other bars in this test and is a little dry to eat

without an accompanying drink. Don't be put off, though, as the taste can't be faulted.

7

Convenient to buy but lacks substance

www.naturevalley.co.uk



Clif Bar £1.49 per bar 68g

The Clif is one of the best-known bars in the test — which should come as no surprise. It's made from organic rolled oats and comes in a large variety of flavours: chocolate chip, crunchy peanut butter, oatmeal raisin walnut, blueberry crisp, chocolate almond fudge and white chocolate macadamia. Each bar contains 37-40g of

carbohydrates, depending on the flavour, and each delivers in terms of both taste and nutrition.

9

Covers all the bases in terms of variety, flavour and nourishment

www.clifbar.co.uk



PowerBar Natural Energy bar £1.49 per bar

PowerBar's Natural Energy cereal bar comprises mostly wholegrain rolled oats, which stay fresher for longer than other oats. This is the perfect carbohydrate based pick-me-up snack when out on the bike. Each bar contains real fruit pieces and, at just 40g

per bar, it's a good-sized snack for a mid-ride boost, with 27g carbohydrates.

Perfectly sized for your weekend ride



www.powerbar.com



9bar pumpkin seed bar 99p per bar

Looking at the packaging of 9bar's pumpkin seed bar, you might expect it to be quite dry. But take a bite and you'll be pleasantly surprised; it's moist, despite its high seed content. It contains only 14.2g of carbohydrates per bar, which might not be enough to keep you going over a long ride, but

its unique taste makes it stand out from the others in this test.

7

Underwhelming first impression erased by taste

www.9bar.com



Getbuzzing 100% Natural bar £1.25 per bar

It may not seem as 'natural' as the other bars, given its compact shape, but the strawberry, raspberry and blueberry flavour bar tastes as fruity as it sounds. It's very manageable during a ride, and contains around 37g of carbohydrates. It's available in four flavours, but you might

want to stay away from the high-fat content Wowbutter flavour.

An unknown quantity holds its own against better-known brands



www.getbuzzing.co.uk



VERDICT

Making sure you top up your carbohydrate stores throughout a long ride will help you feel stronger for longer. Natural energy bars are a great way of taking on carbs while avoiding artificial-tasting energy gels and drinks.

Clif Bar's energy bar is this month's winner, as it provides both excellent taste and nutritional benefits as well as

coming in a wide range of flavours. Each bar provides the perfect amount of carbohydrate recommended to fuel an hour's riding, meaning one less thing to think about. This means you have more time to focus on the important things, i.e. the riding.

None of the bars here are unpleasant or ineffective; simply shop around to see which one works best for you.



Training DVDs

3LC training DVD series



Only £19.99

3LC ROAD RACE

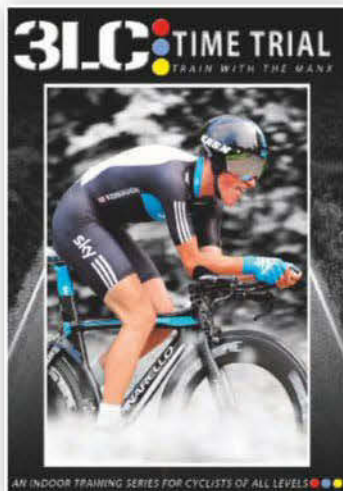
We know you want to be out on the road, but for some reason you're stuck on your turbo. To ease the pain, why not ride with a couple of pros by your side? Join British Track and U-23 Road Race Champ Peter Kennaugh, 2011 World Champ Mark Cavendish and a crew of local Manx riders as they power through a 60-minute turbo session designed to get you ready for the road.



Only £19.99

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What better way to improve your sprint than to train with the fastest man on two wheels – Mark “the Manx Missile” Cavendish. Ride alongside the 2011 World Champion and a crew of local Manx riders as they power through the pedals, push into the red zone and test the limits of their Elite Turbos.



Only £19.99

3LC TIME TRIAL

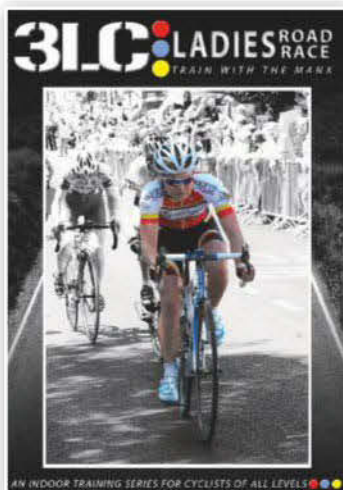
When it comes to time trialing it's just you, your machine and the clock. No teammates to help you, no tactics to hide behind - any mistake made belongs to you and only you. Not to worry - we'll train your body to maintain the pace and your mind to handle the pressure.



Only £19.99

3LC CLIMBING

It's no big secret...climbing is tough - but we're here to help. Join Team Sky's British and European track champion Peter Kennaugh, Steve “the Pocket Rocket” Joughin, and a crew of local Manx riders as they dig deep for the hilltop finish. Keep up and you'll be dancing on the pedals in no time.



Only £19.99

3LC LADIES ROAD RACE

Whether you're training for the upcoming season, a weekend sportive or to improve overall fitness, 3LC Ladies Road Race is the perfect addition to your training regime. Join the Inter-Island Games Gold Medal winning team (Mary, Laura & Ali) and a crew of local lady Manx riders as they power through a turbo session designed with female fitness in mind.



How to get your post-ride recovery right

You've only just finished your ride but it's likely that the aches and pains have already kicked in. However, to ensure you're feeling ready to get back on the bike again as soon as possible, your body needs to recover in the right way

Words Paul Knott Photos Jesse Wild



After a long training ride or sportive, the last thing you'll probably want to think about is when you are next heading out on your bike. However, your next ride starts as soon as your last one finishes. That isn't some phrase lifted from a cheesy motivational poster, but your post-ride recovery can have a direct effect on how your body reacts next time you hit the road.

Some of these simple tips can be easily executed and not only benefit

your training, but help make aches and pains disappear. It isn't necessary that you carry out all of these after every ride, but give some of them a go and see what works for you.

Replenish your energy stores

After a long ride your energy provisions might be severely depleted, or depending on how well you refuelled during your ride, significantly lower than before you headed out. Whether

you did top up your energy levels with gels or food whilst you were on the bike or not, it is vital that you replenish as soon as possible post-ride.

The body is more receptive in the first 20-30 minutes after a ride in taking nutrients from food and transporting it to where it needs it most. And the two main nutrition areas that every rider must think about topping back up are their carbohydrates and protein stores.

Carbohydrates are the main energy supply for the body; you may have



heard the myth that consuming carbohydrates is the first step to putting on weight. However, not all carbohydrates are the same, as the body digests them in different ways. Complex carbohydrates such as whole grains or pasta, take longer for the body to break down and release energy over a longer time, whereas simple carbohydrates consist of processed food such as sugar based sweets or refined bread. These are OK to consume in small amounts straight

Above: The body's carb and protein stores both need topping up

Right: Electrolyte tabs dissolved in water will help rehydrate your body

after a long ride, but complex carbohydrates should be your first port of call when it comes to restoring carbohydrate provisions.

Proteins help rebuild damaged muscles, and the best way of getting it into your body straight after a ride is by consuming a protein shake. This can be made before you leave so it is ready to drink as soon as you get back. The primary form of protein that you will consume day to day will be in your evening meal though. Some high protein foods include red meat, fish, poultry and eggs.

Another area that you must think about post-ride is anti-oxidants, as riding can leave your body vulnerable to illnesses when it is at its weakest. Anti-oxidants help the body fight against any potential illnesses, with the best source found in fruit, particularly citrus-based fruits like oranges, limes and lemons.

Rehydrate

Making sure you stay hydrated during a ride is common knowledge; however, making sure that you rehydrate as soon as you've stepped off your bike is sometimes overlooked.

The need to rehydrate after a ride is

usually pretty evident, especially on hot days, with salt stains on clothing and all parts of the body. These salts include some of the electrolytes the body needs during muscle contractions. This can be particularly crucial on hot days, where increased temperatures will mean your body will sweat more to cool itself down. You can replace these lost electrolytes with electrolyte tablets that easily dissolve in water. The general rule of thumb is for each kilogram lost during a ride, one litre of fluid should be consumed to rehydrate properly.

It is not just 'sports branded' drinks that can help rehydrate, as recent studies have suggested that natural occurring everyday products have similar, and sometimes even better performance benefits. Milk, coconut water and cherry juice have all been shown to help rehydrate the body or repair damaged muscles.

Staying hydrated is not just for those doing sports either, as it can affect your everyday wellbeing, as well as your performance on the bike.

Cool down

You can start your cool-down whilst still on the bike. The last five minutes of



your ride should consist of bringing your heartbeat back down to its resting rate, whilst still turning the pedals over. If this isn't possible, make sure you aren't going from a high intensity effort to a sudden stop without some kind of winding down activity in between.

Stretching immediately after a ride can help prevent your muscles from stiffening up, as well as helping redistribute blood around the body. This is particularly crucial in cycling as blood will primarily be located in your lower extremities.

Recent research has suggested that stretching may not be as vital as first thought after a ride. However, carrying out a stretching routine can help you mentally switch off from a ride or sportive, especially if it has been incident filled. Stretching should be an important area of your training regardless, as inflexibility on the bike can lead to imbalances and potential injuries. Making sure you stay supple off the bike will help your performance on it.

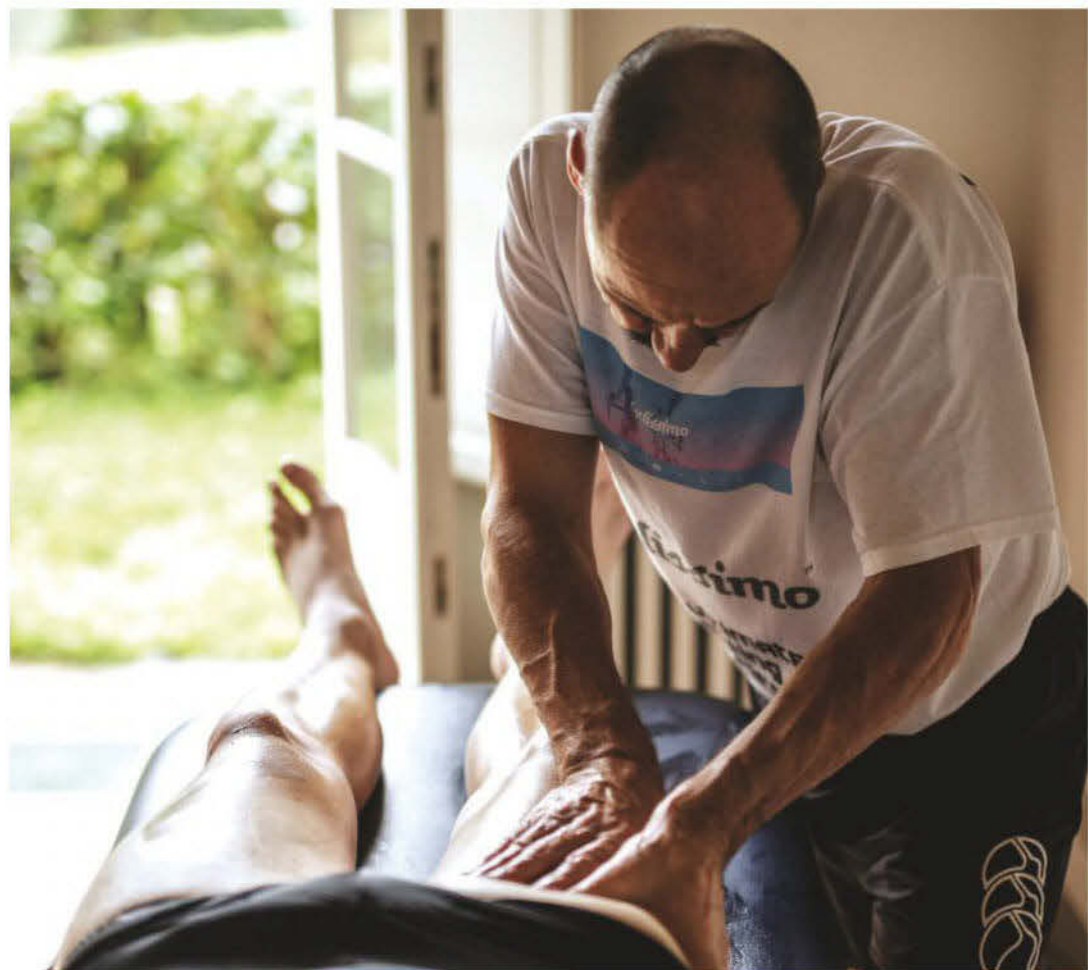
Massage

Having access to a massage after every training ride might be a tad extreme and very costly in the long run, but there are other methods of achieving similar results without shelling out for a personal session after every ride.

One of the next best things you can do is purchase a foam roller, which come in a variety of sizes and firmness. When used in the correct way they can help massage damaged muscle fibres that cause aches and pains. Certain foam roller exercises can also increase flexibility and range of motion. It is important that you experiment with different types of foam rollers to see which one works best for you, but in general the firmer the roller the more efficient it will be.

Compression clothing

Compression garments have been around for a number of years, with professional cycling teams using them for achy leg muscles after races. However, despite the physiological benefits, they have yet to be fully adopted by the general cycling public. This may be down to the confusion that comes from identifying the



difference between compression garments and the everyday leg-warmer and arm-warmer. The two may look very similar but they have very different performance aims.

Despite their tight fitting nature, the purpose of arm- and leg-warmers is another layer of clothing to protect the body against harsh weather conditions. On the other hand, compression garments not only promote circulation during physical activity but have also been shown to increase the removal of waste products from muscles, such as lactic acid. Using compression garments might seem more appealing during winter compared to summer, as they not only help recovery but also make you feel nice and snug at the same time.

Above: A post-ride massage can soothe aches and pains caused by damaged muscle fibres

Above right: Have a cold bath to help with muscle soreness

Active recovery

Recovering by taking part in further exercise may seem odd but if it's done at the correct intensity and for the right time it can be very beneficial. During Tour de France rest days, professional riders don't actually rest completely. They use this day not just to fulfil media duties but also to go for a recovery ride, which can still consist of up to three hours on the bike.

Obviously for the everyday cyclist a three-hour recovery ride would be a ridiculous proposition, yet the idea of active recovery can help you feel a lot better in the days after a sportive.

The aim of active recovery is to promote blood flow and clear any lactic acid or waste products that may still be lingering in your muscles. This can

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WHAT NOT TO DO!

Anti-inflammatory drugs

Despite sometimes being useful to treat muscle strains and joint sprains, anti-inflammatory drugs should not be used as a primary recovery technique. Over-consumption of anti-inflammatory drugs can potentially lead to liver damage.

Indulge after burning calories

Despite burning upwards of 1,000 calories on a ride, the following hours aren't the time to pig out and undo all that hard work. Your body is like a car that needs petrol or diesel to run, if you put the wrong fuel in it won't function correctly.

Getting straight into a car to drive home

OK, sometimes this is unavoidable if you have driven to a sportive, but make sure that you take on board some of our recovery tips listed in order to reduce any muscle pains that may occur.



harm than good. If you can stand a 10-20 minute dip, which may be the slowest bath of your life, your muscles will thank you in the long run.

Recent research has suggested that taking a freezing cold soak may actually reduce your performance ability, as the body is unable to recover naturally from the physical exertion. Our advice is to use ice baths when necessary after particularly tough days in the saddle, and not as a regular recovery method.

Rest the right way

Wait a minute, 'rest AND ride to recover'? The use of the two may seem strange, but using both in your recovery process can really help. It is the way that you rest that will ultimately encourage the benefits.

An often-used phrase within cycling is 'Don't stand if you can sit, don't sit if you can lie down, don't stay awake if you can sleep'. Even though this quote has ultimately been borrowed from an American football coach, its premise within cycling is fair to say the least. When it comes to resting, it may seem obvious that the more you are off your feet the faster your muscles will recover. Elevating your legs after a long ride will improve the body's ability to pump blood back to the heart, as your heart will be put under less stress and doesn't have to fight against gravity.

Rest also falls under the bracket of focusing your attention elsewhere, which could mean going out for a few drinks with friends to take your mind off cycling. Whether this is the ideal preparation the night before a long sportive, could boil down to whether you decide to enjoy a few alcoholic drinks or not.

End

range from a gentle walk or if you feel like more saddle time, a recovery ride on your bike. It is vital to remember that this is a recovery ride and that it should just be a case of gently spinning on flat terrain, rather than adding another training session to your week.

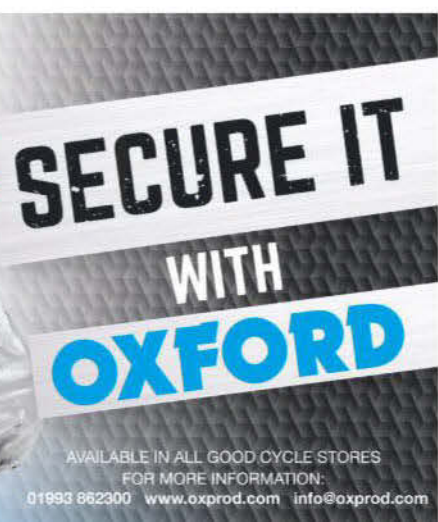
Ice baths

The dreaded ice bath has long been a recovery technique for people in a wide spectrum of sports. You may not want to hear it but it is still used as a highly effective way of fighting muscle soreness, flushing out waste products in your muscles and reducing inflammation within elite sport. Professional teams have taken this to a new level with the introduction of cryotherapy, which is where riders will

stand in temperature controlled chambers for three minutes set at a bone tingling -150°C!

In spite of all this talk of colder is better, without professional observation you must make sure that the temperature of your ice bath ranges between 10-15°C (50-59°F). If the temperature is warmer than this it will still give you some physiological benefits; however, if the mercury drops below these recommended temperatures than it could do you more

Recovering by doing further exercise may seem odd, but done at the correct intensity, it can be very beneficial



Short, steep climbs

Climbs in the UK are often over fairly quickly, but commonly feature steep gradients. We look at the best way to tackle this kind of challenge

Words Hannah Reynolds Photo Andy Jones

Take this outside and do it on real hills to help hone your climbing technique and work your upper body as well.



■ Time taken: 80 minutes

Climbing in the UK can often mean short, steep climbs that require considerable power to conquer but are over very quickly. The technique for dealing with this type of climb is naturally very different to more mountainous terrain.

While short in effort, they still require pacing; attack too hard at the bottom and you will be swinging over the bars by the top. Often this style of terrain means that there is a descent rolling into it, if it's a clear run don't touch the brakes, keep all the momentum you've got to propel you up the opposite side. By pedalling into the bottom of the climb you can get on top of your gear quickly and the climb will be over much faster. Approaching a steep gradient from a dead stop is significantly harder.

The best way to improve your ability on

this type of climb is out on the road as technique plays a part as well as fitness. One way is to create a circuit so you can attack the same climb, or several climbs, repeatedly during your ride, recover on the descents and the flats but really push hard up the climbs.

If you can't do this out on the road then the next best thing is to mimic it on the static trainer, Wattbike or rollers. Warm up for 15 minutes and then perform five intervals of five minutes with five minutes' recovery in-between. At the start of each interval click through the gears till it feels slightly too hard and then attack. Hold the pace as long as you can — don't worry if it becomes a struggle towards the end. Don't shift down, keep pushing and try to keep your cadence as high as possible.

During the five minutes of recovery spin your legs out, keeping it around 90rpm.

TRAINING SESSION

Time in minutes	Zone
0-15	1-2
15-20	3-4
20-25	2
25-30	3-4
35-40	2
40-45	3-4
45-50	2
50-55	3-4
55-60	2
60-65	3-4
65-70	2
70-80	1-2

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Upper back relief

This month **CA** looks at how best to exercise one of cycling's most common problem areas

Words: Robert Hicks

Cycling for long periods of time can place pressure upon the upper region of the back, creating tension, which will result in stiffness and in some cases, pain. There are a number of reasons why this pressure occurs. Sitting for long periods of time in the saddle means the head is kept in a fixed position, more often than not extended to look up the road, causing the neck muscles to stiffen up over time. In some cases this can lead to trapped nerves and extreme soreness in and around the cervical part of the

vertebrae and further down the back. Holding on to the handlebars puts a lot of pressure on your shoulders and all of the way across the trapezius muscle, as they extend to reach. You can see why it is so important to have a bike that fits — problems that arise from an incorrect fit such as a saddle too low, or too far back, or handlebars that require you to reach too far, will be exacerbated in these areas.

Providing your bike is set up correctly, you should only experience some slight discomfort from stiff muscles now and again

from spending extended periods of time in the saddle — something that is unavoidable. After all, this is a sport, and sport hurts from time to time.

However, if after riding you are experiencing real discomfort and are unable to turn your head or move freely you should visit your GP who can refer you to a physiotherapist, osteopath or chiropractor who can determine if there is an underlying issue that needs attention.

For general tightness and sore muscles, try these self-massage techniques.



Side-to-side tennis ball massage

Unlike the legs and arms, the back is quite a tricky area to work on, especially on your own. So for a couple of these techniques, you are going to need some help. Don't worry; it doesn't involve an extra pair of hands — just a couple of tennis balls.

1. The first muscle to work on is the trapezius, a huge muscle that spans the neck, shoulder and the upper back. Think of the trapezius as an inverted triangle that runs from shoulder to shoulder and completes midway down the spine.
2. Stand flat against a wall and place the ball on the area of the muscle that is located to the side of the neck at the top of the back. It will feel fleshy.
3. Gently sway from side to side, moving the ball only an inch in either direction. It's up to you how much pressure you want to place on the area. This can be achieved by pushing more weight into the wall.

Up and down tennis ball massage

1. Standing up against the wall, bend your legs so you drop down four or five inches.
2. Place the ball in the same position and slowly extend your legs, to straighten back up again. The ball should roll down the back slightly.
3. Bend the legs again and repeat the process.
4. Repeat this on the other side of your back. There is no set amount of reps, or time to take on each area. Do it on feel, and work on the area until you feel the pressure has eased.





Soften your trapezius

You can work on these same muscles without using a tennis ball.

1. Lie down on one side and use a pillow to ensure your neck remains in line with your spine and is stable. Lying down will also help relax the trapezius muscle, as it doesn't have to support any weight, such as your arms.
2. Bring your lower arm beneath your chin and reach round to the soft area that sits in the middle of the top area of your back.
3. Using your fingertips, gently press down for a few moments before releasing. Work that area until you feel the pressure easing. Without causing discomfort, try and reach as far down the back as possible.
4. Turn on your other side and repeat the process.

Self-massage

Once your trapezius feels better (softer is a good indication), then you can work on more specific muscles. Unfortunately, as you only have one pair of hands, and no one is that flexible, there are only a few other areas you can work on: the splenius cervicis muscle, the levator scapulae muscle and the supraspinatus muscle. These muscles run from the bottom of the neck and run along the back of the clavicle towards the shoulder.

1. In a seated position, with your arms relaxed by your side, slightly rolled forwards, use your index and forefinger and firmly place pressure where the muscle starts to raise towards your neck.
2. Work across the back, following the line of your clavicle until you reach your shoulder. If you can, try to perform this massage after you have come out of the bath or shower, as your muscles will be at their softest. It's also easier to run your finger across slightly moist skin.



Stretching

Stretching also works. It is a great way to alleviate tightness and can be performed quickly and effectively throughout the day, even at your desk.

Shoulder shrugs

Sitting upright, keeping your posture steady, rotate both shoulders in a circular motion, backwards. Perform it slowly and work on turning the shoulder back so you can feel the muscles surrounding the deltoid stretching. Perform 10 rotations, before rotating the shoulders forward 10 times.

Crossover shoulder stretch

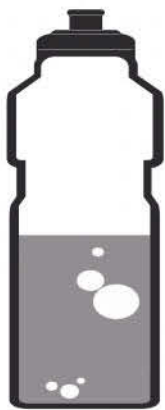
Stand with your knees bent, cross your arms over and grab the back of your knees. Keeping your head and neck in a straight line, start to rise upwards. You should feel tension in your shoulders and back. Hold for three to five seconds and lower. Repeat this as many times as necessary.



Did you know?

Some headaches are caused by back and neck tension. If you are often experiencing headaches towards the end of your ride, or hours after it, it could be down to the discomfort you are experiencing in these areas

HYDRATION



101

We're all aware that hydration is important, but what exactly is the best drinking strategy for cyclists?

Words Laura Tilt Photos Jesse Wild

For cyclists, getting your drinking right is just as important as eating the right stuff. Failure to eat enough carbohydrate can result in 'jelly legs', but failure to drink enough can diminish your performance and, more seriously, have an impact on your health.

Almost as soon as you jump on your bike and start pedalling, your core temperature increases as a result of muscular contractions. To avoid becoming dangerously hot — and maintain a temperature of 37°C — your body gets rid of this excess heat by sweating, which results in fluid loss. As sweat evaporates, heat is transferred to the surrounding air, helping you stay cool.

Sweat losses during exercise are exacerbated by heat, humidity and exercise intensity — so the hotter it is and the harder you work, the more fluid you lose. In humid conditions, sweat evaporates more slowly (if at all) from the skin, so the body is forced to increase your sweating rate, further increasing fluid loss.

Exercising in the cold might seem less risky, but it presents its own challenges, as fluid is lost through respiration, which, coupled with reduced thirst (when you're feeling the chill, a cold sports drink doesn't seem so appealing) means dehydration can be an issue during the winter.

In addition to fluid, electrolytes such as sodium and potassium are also lost in sweat, affecting fluid balance and muscle contraction. As fluid and electrolytes are lost, blood volume reduces, heart rate and body temperature increase and dehydration takes hold. When you consider that around 65 per cent of body weight is accounted for by water, it's easy to understand why even small fluctuations in fluid will affect bodily functions.

On its most basic level, mild dehydration can leave you feeling a bit fuzzy-headed and fatigued. In one study, published in the *British Journal of Nutrition*, men and women undergoing voluntary fluid restriction experienced headaches and had lower levels of concentration.

Dehydration can affect how well you ride at relatively low levels, with studies showing negative effects are measureable at fluid losses equivalent to around two per cent of body weight. That's around 1.4kg for a 70kg male. Given that up to a litre of sweat can be lost per hour in extreme conditions such as the Tour de France, dehydration is a serious risk.

As dehydration progresses, your body temperature and heart rate increase, and mental function is reduced, affecting motor control and decision-making, which could be dangerous on the roads. Research also shows that dehydration makes exercise feel harder at any given work rate. In a recent study published in the *Journal of Sports Science*, cyclists whose urine concentration showed they were dehydrated reported lower energy levels and increased sensations of fatigue, pain and heat compared to well-hydrated controls.

To complicate matters, by the time you become dehydrated, your body struggles to absorb fluid from the intestines, making it more difficult to correct losses. One thing's for



sure: when it comes to staying hydrated, prevention is better than cure.

Recommendations

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to hydration, as gender, body size, temperature, fitness levels and environment all affect how much fluid you need. However, most experts agree the aim of a hydration plan is to limit fluid losses during training or competition to less than two per cent of body weight (see 'calculating sweat losses'). You should never drink so much during exercise that you actually gain weight in the process.

Hydration status based on body weight changes as percentages (ACSM guidelines)

Well hydrated	-1 to +1%
Minimal dehydration	-1 to -3%
Significant dehydration	-3 to -5%
Serious dehydration	-5%



What are electrolytes?

Salts and minerals that regulate movement of fluid between cells and conduct electrical signals to the brain, muscles and nervous system

Before

The best way to limit dehydration is to start each and every exercise session well hydrated, which means adopting good drinking habits throughout the day. Get into the habit of drinking a glass of water on waking and take regular drink breaks through the day — don't limit to mealtimes.

As a general guide, you can use the colour of your urine as a marker of hydration. If it's dark and strong-smelling, chances are you need to drink. A couple of hours before heading out, have a large glass of water

(400-600ml), which gives your body enough time to absorb what it needs, and correct any deficits. If you're not going to have a chance to hydrate on the bike, consuming 300-500ml around 15 minutes before you head out is a good idea.

During

If you're cycling for less than 40 minutes, you won't need to drink, provided you start well hydrated. Emma Barraclough, senior sports nutritionist at SiS nutrition, advises adopting a little-and-often drinks pattern for longer

rides. "This allows the fluid to empty easily from the stomach, rather than trying to absorb a large volume all at once," says Barraclough. "150ml-200ml every 15-20 minutes is an ideal target to start with, although you may need more than this in hotter conditions."

"Cyclists are lucky in that they have a really easy way of carrying fluid with them as they ride — bottle cages!" she adds. "Having two cages on your bike allows you to carry at least 1,000ml of fluid on your bike, meaning that a few well-planned stops will allow you to keep enough fluid with you."

Long, hot rides demand regular breaks to rehydrate

Hydrate the natural way

Just as bananas can be used as an alternative to sports gels, sports drinks aren't the only way to stay hydrated. One of the main barriers to using sports drinks is the cost. At around 90p per 500ml bottle, they aren't a cheap choice, even if you are buying supermarket own brands (which come in at around 40p per 500ml). As a cheaper alternative, you can make your own isotonic sports drink using fruit juice, water and a pinch of salt (see 'Make your own' below for more information).

Many natural foods can also be used to help meet your fluid needs — fruit and vegetables have a high water content plus minerals and sugars found naturally in the body, which makes them good for rehydration. In one 2009 study carried out by the University of Aberdeen Medical School, consumption of water melon and cucumber helped replace lost fluids after exercise more effectively than plain water. Tomatoes, strawberries, oranges, pineapple and leafy greens also have a high water content.

Another good (and cost effective) recovery option is milk. As well as ticking the fluid box, milk contains protein, carbohydrate and more sodium than an equivalent volume of regular sports drink — and studies show it is as effective for recovery, if not more so. In a 2010 study from the University of Texas, trained cyclists given chocolate milk after cycling went on to perform better during a subsequent 40km time trial than those given an isocaloric sports drink or placebo.

Tomato juice is also a helpful post-ride choice. The naturally sodium-rich beverage is high in lycopene, which can help to reduce post-exercise muscle soreness. In a 2013 study from Greece, athletes consuming tomato juice after training experienced fewer markers of muscle damage than a control group who drank a carbohydrate-only drink.

Calculating sweat losses

If you're regularly taking part in long rides, it can be worth measuring your sweat losses during a typical training session. This is a regular practice among pro racers, but it can also be useful for amateur riders to help you establish how much you need to be drinking. Each kilogram of weight lost is equivalent to approximately one litre of fluid.

How to measure sweat losses

Weigh yourself before a ride barefoot and in minimal clothing (preferably after going to the loo).

Commence your ride, consuming fluid at a comfortable rate, noting the volume that you consume.

After completing your session, towel off any excess sweat and weigh yourself before you eat or drink.

Subtract your post-exercise weight from your pre-exercise weight and add on the amount of fluid consumed during exercise to establish total fluid loss.

Use your weight deficit as a guide to how well you hydrated and how much you need to drink afterwards.

Example

Weight before exercise: 70kg

Weight after exercise: 69kg

Fluid consumed during exercise: 800ml

Total fluid loss: 1.8 litres

As for what to drink, plain water is fine if you're exercising for under an hour, although if you find yourself struggling to consume enough, a splash of squash can help to encourage you to drink. In rides lasting longer than an hour, an isotonic drink with four to eight per cent carbohydrate (4-8g per 100ml) is recommended.

"Fluid is best absorbed when delivered as a carbohydrate-electrolyte solution in an isotonic formulation, as this concentration is the same as the body," says Barraclough. This also allows you to tick the fluid and carbohydrate boxes in one go.

In events lasting between one and two hours or more, your drink should also contain sodium. "You lose both fluid and salts in sweat, so replacing each of them is key," explains Barraclough. "If you just drink pure water, you will further dilute your body's sodium concentration. This stimulates your kidneys to produce more urine, meaning that you end up losing the fluid that you were trying to replace. Having a drink containing electrolytes allows you to maintain this sodium balance."

Sports drinks usually tick the sodium box, but if you're using solid food or bars and gels for energy, hydration or electrolyte tabs can

**Make
your own**
500ml fruit juice + 500ml
water + pinch of salt
or 200ml full sugar squash
+ 800ml plain water
+ pinch of salt

Home-made drinks can be just
as effective as sports products



Good hydration is just as important to recovery as rest

be added to plain water to help you maintain sodium balance. The tablets don't contain carbohydrate, but provide sodium and potassium to support hydration.

After

Replacing fluid losses after exercise is a vital part of the recovery process, and should be given the same priority as your post-ride meal. The aim is to replace any fluid deficits during exercise. So, if you started your session at 70kg and ended it at 69kg, you've a 1kg or 1L deficit.

Because not all fluid consumed after exercise is absorbed (some is lost in urine production) the aim is to replace around 125-150 per cent of what is lost. So, if you'd lost 1kg, you'd need to consume around 1,250-1,500ml to correct the deficit.

The key word here is 'fluid' — not just sports drinks. Fruit squash, juice, smoothies and milk and even fluids from foods such as soup, yoghurt and stews all count. According to the Institute of Medicine, around 20 per cent of our daily fluid intake comes from solid food.

When should cyclists use electrolyte tabs?

"Electrolyte tabs don't contain any energy, so they are great for hydration on short rides

of under 90 minutes," says Barraclough. "They can also be a good option for before or after long hot rides in the summer. For longer rides, you need to be taking in some additional carbohydrate to keep your energy levels up.

"A good sports drink should contain six to eight per cent carbohydrate with electrolytes to help maintain sodium balance. You could of course use electrolyte tabs with energy bars or gels though as the energy source."

What about over-drinking?

Although less common, over-hydration — drinking too much — is a serious risk. Guzzling large amounts of plain water can dilute blood sodium levels resulting in a condition known as hyponatremia — low blood sodium. If untreated, this can be fatal.

Although it's relatively rare, hyponatremia is not unheard-of in recreational athletes who have consumed large quantities of plain water. Problems with over-hydration arise when fluid is consumed in greater amounts than sweat losses, i.e. gulping down large quantities. Listen to your body and drink at a comfortable, natural rate.

End

Your say

How do you stay hydrated on the bike?

@liz545 Shortish rides — just water. Longer rides or hot days call for hydration tablets.

@mmmcaffeine Might sound silly but I prefer clear bottles. Reminds me to drink if I can see that the fluid level isn't dropping.

@uberDaveO 1-2 hours, just water or water + hydro tabs. 2hr-plus, I use Skratch Labs hydration and energy. For early morning/late evening rides a large glass of water helps rehydrate before exercise.

@Mum3Fi I just use plain water or weak orange squash. Don't use energy gels, but I have a fruit-and-veg smoothie before I go out for energy.

@H2Whoah It can be hard drinking to thirst. My advice is to drink little and often.

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TRAINING TRIBULATIONS

Jocelyn's Etape du Tour training culminates in a lesson on tapering

What a journey it has been. Hours spent bent double over my handlebars, endless washing cycles of Lycra kit, kitchen cupboards overflowing with protein shakes, a fridge stocked high with chicken and fish. One of my colleagues summed it up well, referring to my preoccupation with recovery food, when he exclaimed, "You've consumed more protein than Arnold Schwarzenegger!"

With the idea of the challenge permeating the majority of my thoughts I feel as though it has become an obsession. A wedding this weekend? But that throws my week off. Maybe I shouldn't go.

It has become an obsession driven by fear. The fear of not doing enough, the fear of not being good enough, the fear of failure. But wrapped in that fear has been hope. The hope that I have done enough, the hope that I'm good enough and the hope that I make it to the finish line on my bike!

By the time most of you read this my challenge will be over but, as I write, it is just four weeks to go.

If you read last month's column, you'll know that my training was interrupted for a few weeks by illness and in the last few days I have felt as though my fitness is finally back on track. Then a friend uttered the word that I had been dreading to hear: tapering. How can I even think about that when I feel I still have work to do?

I didn't really know much about

tapering so I spoke with cycling coach Rob Mortlock to glean as much info as I could.

"The purpose of the taper is to prepare your body for what's coming up — you want to go into your event sharp as a bullet, not tired. It's something you do one to two weeks pre-event," he explained.

"You need to find the right balance between keeping the legs ticking over and getting the right amount of rest.

"Unfortunately, there is no magic formula. It is a very individual thing. It's a process of discovering what works for you and that comes from experience. It also changes as you develop as an athlete. If you tapered for an event in 2014 that could be very different from how you need to taper in 2015. It's the benefit of hindsight that helps on this one."

I've never really thought about tapering previously. If I have a tough event one week I will just back off in the few days leading up to it.

Jocelyn Mack

AGE: 34

WEIGHT: 10st

JOB: Professional dancer and part-time writer for Time Inc's cycling titles

YEARS CYCLING: Two

BIKE: Specialized Ruby Disc

LIVES: South-East London

GOAL: To get fit enough to ride the 142km Etape du Tour this July

Top tips

- Taper 1-2 weeks before your event. The more physically challenging, the longer your taper will be.
- Favour rest over riding but don't stop riding completely.
- Maintain the intensity but reduce the volume.
- Stop resistance training (high gear, low cadence) 7-10 days before the event.
- Plan to ride for around 40 minutes on the day before the event.

CA EXPERT



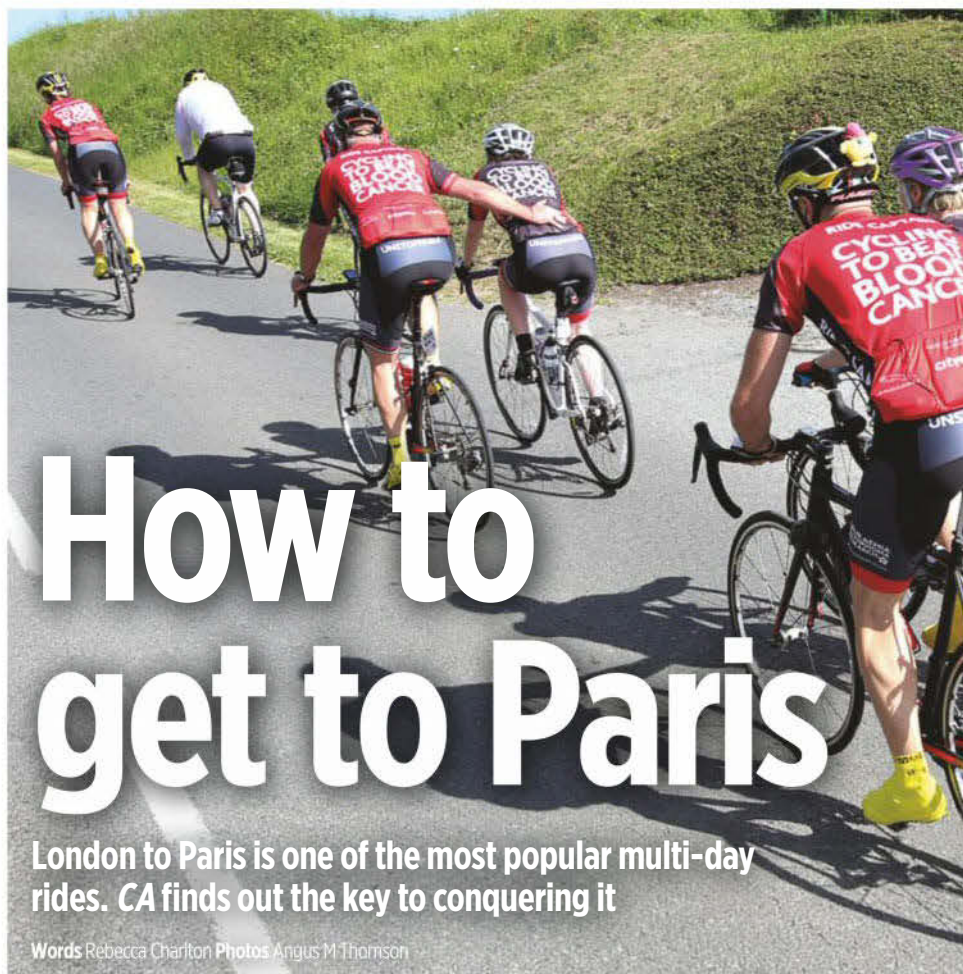
Rob Mortlock,
level 3 British
cycling coach

"It's certainly more important to rest than worry about training. But if you do nothing for a whole week your body will shut down and go into rest mode. Quite often when people stop exercising they get ill," Mortlock told me.

"Keep doing the high-intensity training, maintaining the effort, so it's not a shock to the body when those systems fire up again. Keep the intensity but cut the volume right back; nothing that will tire your legs for the next day. If you normally do a 30-minute high-intensity session do just 15 minutes and follow it with a rest day, then the next day a zone 2 ride, for example. You should also ride your bike the day before the event, just for around 40 minutes."

There has been so much to think about during this whole process and I have learnt so much about myself as a cyclist. Now I just have to hope that everything I've learnt along the way comes together in a strong and successful ride.





How to get to Paris

London to Paris is one of the most popular multi-day rides. CA finds out the key to conquering it

Words Rebecca Charlton Photos Angus M Thomson

Here at *Cycling Active*, some of us are starting to make preparations to ride from London to Paris this September with Leukaemia and Lymphoma Research.

Whether it takes you 24 hours, three days, four days, or even more, this ride from capital to capital is becoming one of our favourite things to do on a bike. The multi-day challenge, concluding at the Champs-Élysées in sight of the Eiffel Tower, provides a great sense of achievement for riders of all ability levels. A long ride of this type naturally requires much planning, nutritional savvy, pacing nous and group etiquette.

There are always many questions ahead of a big ride, especially if it's your first; you'll be pushing yourself into new territory on the bike. We've spoken to Beating Blood Cancers London to Paris ride captain Nick Baxter, 39, to get the skinny on L2P and how to get the most out of back-to-back days in the saddle.

CA: How would you sum up the LLR London-to-Paris route?

NB: The London-to-Paris route is a challenge and incorporates some fairly steep hills. However, with training, the support of fellow riders and the L2P crew, it is perfectly manageable.

CA: What are the biggest challenges on each day?

NB: Clearly the biggest challenge each day is actually riding your bike! Making sure you have trained well will not only make each day easier, but will also give you time to take in the stunning scenery en route. There'll also be a time trial section at Brands Hatch on the Grand Prix circuit. I've raced at Brands Hatch on my bike before and I can tell you there isn't one section of flat on it.

We will be climbing a total of roughly 1,170 metres on day one, 1,140m on day two, 610m on day three and 830m on day four. The two hills on day two are probably the most demanding: one straight after lunch, which is fairly long, and one that is shorter but steeper with switchbacks.

CA: Which mistake is most commonly made by riders?

NB: The most common mistake I've seen is riders changing their line on the road without checking for other cyclists, cars or motorbikes. Always look before you make a move; it's so important for safety. In addition, I would advise applying chamois cream and sun cream from day one to prevent saddle soreness and sunburn.

CA: What would be your top training tips for London to Paris?

NB: Make sure you get some good training miles in your legs and include hills in your rides. Practise riding on consecutive days so that it's not a new



experience on day two of L2P. Also practise eating and drinking while riding your bike.

CA: How can people conserve energy to get through each day?

NB: We will be riding in a large group, so riders will feel the benefit of drafting. Don't worry if this is unfamiliar to you, as the ride captains are there to keep you riding safely. In addition, gravity is your friend. Practise riding downhill at least as fast as you're travelling on the flat. Rolling downhill at speed equates to energy-free mileage.

CA: Do you have any top tips for anyone worried about keeping up?

Beating Blood Cancers London to Paris



Leukaemia and Lymphoma's London to Paris is a four-day endurance ride, taking in the varied landscapes of Kent and northern France, covering 500km in total. For the full pro experience, the event offers rolling road closures throughout France, full mechanical back-up, experienced ride captains, sports physios and motorcycle outriders. All the money you raise goes directly towards improving the lives of blood cancer patients. The 2015 edition is now sold out but if you would like to be added to the waiting list email londonparis@beatingbloodcancers.org.uk.



NB: There will be fast, medium and social ride groups on the road. The ride captains will be there to help if the pace is a little quick and there are plenty of opportunities for people to change groups during the ride.

CA: How important is nutrition?

NB: Nutrition is very important when riding long distances over consecutive days. Make sure you have a good breakfast each morning and some food and drink to eat on the bike.

CA: What if someone starts to struggle on the ride?

NB: The ride captains are there to advise with cycling technique and to



“Practise riding on consecutive days so that it’s not a new experience on day two of London to Paris”

help you on the ride. There are mechanics with each group, should you encounter any bike issues and there will be trained medics too.

CA: How hilly is the route and what are your tips for being able to tackle the climbs?

NB: There are hills on the route — France is not flat. Try to use your forward momentum into the hills, as

this will carry you up the first part without using much effort. Once you’re riding up the hill, try to stick to a steady pace. Pedal smoothly while keeping your upper body stable on the bike and using the gears effectively to make pedalling easier.

This event is for adventurous cyclists looking to take on a challenge. It’s not a race but you will need to train for it. You can choose to ride with one of three speed groups, depending on your ability. The slowest of these will be riding at an average speed of 20kph (12.5mph) and the fastest group will be riding at 32kph (20mph). All speed groups will receive the same support from our specialist crew.



CA says: beat saddle sores

Given all the hard work and planning you’ll put in ahead of a big sportive like L2P, the last thing you’ll want is to suffer from saddle sores. Becoming uncomfortable in the saddle can ruin a ride, and sores can become quite nasty if you’re riding on them day after day.

Not everyone chooses to use anti-bacterial chamois cream, but it can be a good way to keep bacteria at bay, so it is worth the investment if you think you may be prone to sores. There are loads of great options on the market. A good-fitting pair of shorts with a chamois that feels comfortable will also help. Baggy Lycra or anything that has prominent seams may chafe, so always try your shorts before heading out for your big ride. Sitting correctly on a saddle that suits you and your riding position will prevent further movement during your hours on the bike.

You'll be a tourer, my son

Having grown lonely cycling solo, *Adam Holder* embarked on the tour of a lifetime with his 11-year-old son — here he shares the secrets of their success

Words Adam Holder Photos Andy Jones

When we first come to cycling, we have two epiphanies. These thunderclaps of realisation happen early on, in quick succession, and they change our lives. First: realising the sheer practicality of a bicycle. Second: realising the great distances it's possible to cover with relative ease.

For me, the combination of these two things eventually defined the 'type' of cyclist I became. I experimented with Lycra and the

squaring-off of my jaw as I flirted with road cycling. I got baggy and hairy and muddy astride a mountain bike on the trails. However, soon I realised that the luggage-toting, mileage-devouring capabilities of the touring bike were where my heart lay.

Versatile enough to transport me on my daily commute, but equally happy on leisure rides or shopping expeditions, my tourer came into its own as I discovered it would allow me to remain self-sufficient while exploring great swathes of the

countryside at the genteel, civilised pace that only a bicycle can provide.

I became a two-wheeled hobo. If my road bike were a Ferrari and my mtb a Land Rover, then my touring bike was a VW Camper. The world became a very accessible and inviting mistress. Intoxicated by the endless possibilities of adventure, I disappeared for days at a time — including a solo, unsupported ride from John o' Groats to Land's End.

But my cycling was a double-edged sword. The solitude and loneliness that



Ride behind your child and fly the flag for road safety



The open road is the perfect place to nurture the father-son bond



"That's brilliant dad but when are we eating?"



had once been an attractive by-product of my touring began to wear thin. I remember very clearly cycling along the shore of the Moray Firth and seeing a family of wild seals playing in the water just yards away. I turned excitedly to point out the discovery to someone — to anyone — only to remember that I was utterly alone.

Having no one with whom to share that special, unique moment crystallised a thought: these adventures were being diminished through being alone. As I watched that pod of seals

roll, dive and chase one another, they taught me that life is fuller and richer when experienced with others.

The seals tracked and followed me for a couple of miles as I pedalled along the coast, and every time one of them glanced across to regard me, it was as though those large, doleful eyes were accusing me, or asking: "Can you imagine how much your children would have loved this moment? Where are they?"

These days I tour alone less often. Last summer I cycled with my son Robert, who had just turned 11, from our home in Birmingham to Mount Snowdon. We rode north through Stafford, Nantwich and on to Chester, before slicing west along the North Wales coastline. We finally dropped into the town of Llanberis, weaving our way through some of the most heart-stopping scenery in these islands. The following day we climbed the mountain together.

They were the most satisfying, glorious, fulfilling and exciting six days of my entire life. They topped my End to End ride 100 times over. Twelve months later, we still talk about the things we saw and experienced together, and I know the memories will bind us for ever. You can't buy that. ▶▶

Top touring tips

I've since been asked for advice on cycle touring with youngsters, so here goes...

On bikes

Robert rode for five days, over 300 miles, on a £99, supermarket mountain bike. Equipment shouldn't be a barrier (or an excuse) to getting out there. That said, make sure the bike fits and is roadworthy. Overlooking or ignoring these factors will turn even the shortest foray into the most unpleasant of experiences.

I removed the knobbly tyres from Robert's bike and fitted slick road tyres. These helped the bike roll easier on tarmac and meant he didn't feel as though he were pedalling through treacle. Mudguards, lights, pannier rack, bar-ends and bottle cages were added. The bar-ends crucially offered a variety of hand positions while riding, aiding comfort.

On equipment

Less is definitely more. Examine every item individually and ask yourself if you really need it. If there is even the slightest doubt, leave it behind.

You'll need a 'festival-type' tent, sleeping mats, sleeping bags and cooking equipment. Again, you needn't put the credit card on meltdown for any of this stuff. Shopping sensibly, and doing your homework, should see you able to obtain the foundations for a night under the stars for around £100.

You get what you pay for, of course. Spend any surplus on additional comfort: a better sleeping mat or a warmer sleeping bag. Don't take too much clothing. Most kids don't care about wearing the same set of clothes day in, day out. You're a cycling hobo, and in the interests of space and weight, dress accordingly. Change regularly only those clothes in regular contact with your skin: cycling shorts and jerseys. Everything else can be worn for weeks.

Finally, fit panniers. Having everything you need lashed on to your bike is not only satisfying, it's integral to the whole endeavour. I fitted smallish panniers to Robert's bike, in which he carried his light — but vital — items. His pride in transporting them from place to place, the sense of freedom it provided, was plain to see. My bike carried everything else; it was heavy, but I didn't care, and Robert was happy to be contributing. My last word on panniers: buy the best ones you can afford, and make sure they're waterproof.

On planning

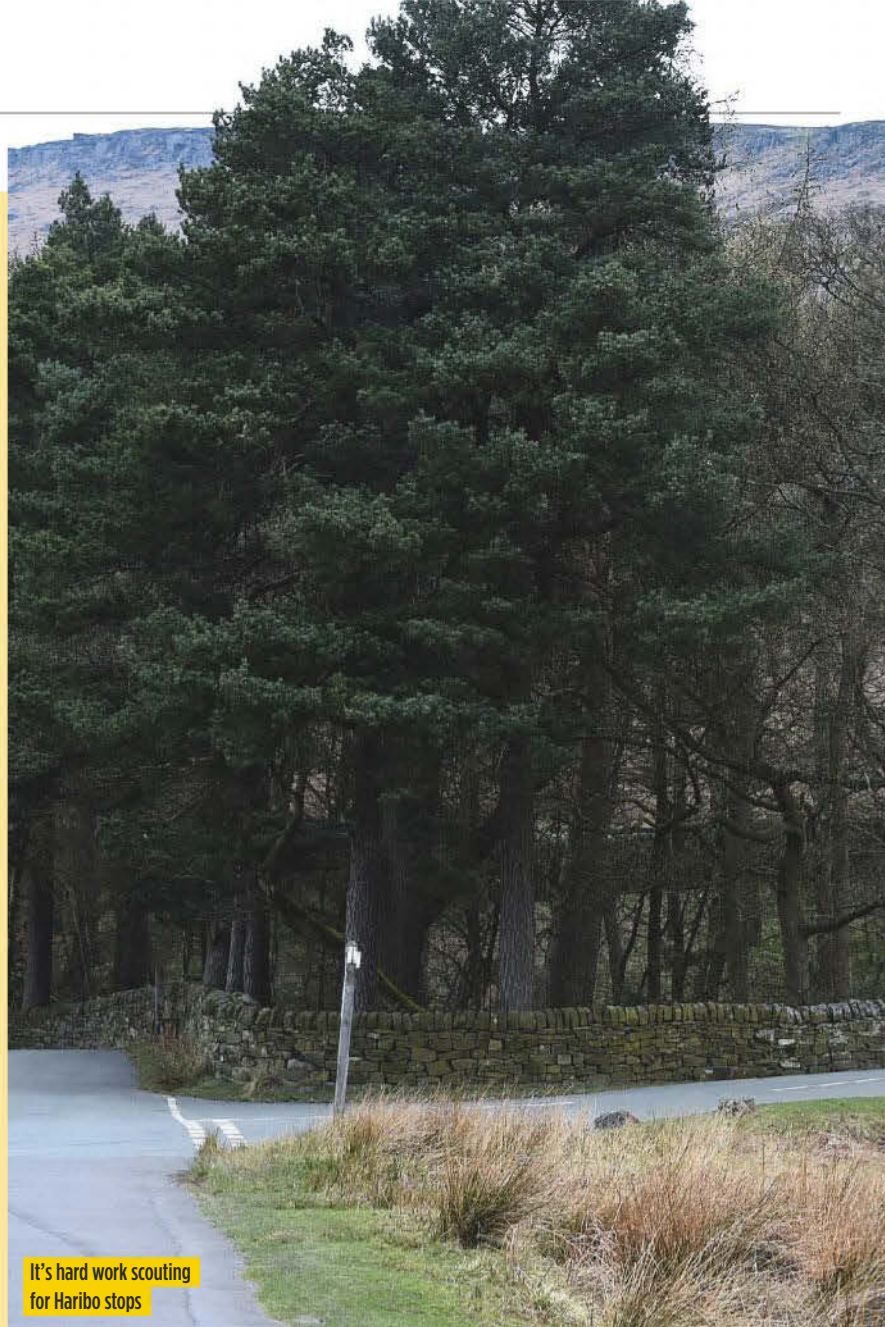
Half the joy in any journey, holiday or adventure lies in the anticipation and the preparation. Don't exclude the youngsters from this stage.

Our tour to Snowdon was six months in the planning — and the days we spent plotting and scheming together were truly precious. We pored over huge Ordnance Survey maps clutching highlighter pens to mark our route. We disappeared for whole Saturdays on our bikes as we prepared our legs; we shopped for equipment, and then road-tested it.

It's worth taking some Bikeability training together before you go, to ingrain the important aspects of safe, competent road riding. The planning is important because, when the road goes upwards, your youngster will be less inclined to complain because they will be psychologically prepared for it. When you have to get the tent up in a hurry because of terrible incoming weather, it'll be a slick, quick operation.

If you plan to camp, use proper campsites pre-plotted into your route. Wild camping is exciting, but when with children it's just going to be so much easier — and safer — if you have access to clean, running water, toilets and showers. Make sure that you're aware of local B&B or hostel accommodation near to where you plan to camp, too. If things turn sour, you'll be in a position to easily head toward the sanctuary of four brick walls and a roof.

On multiple-day tours with children, use hostel or B&B accommodation every other night anyway, as it'll give you a



It's hard work scouting for Haribo stops

chance to dry out your kit and regroup — and there's nothing like sleeping in a real bed for recharging the batteries.

On training

Variety and preparedness are the crucial ingredients of your training. A mix of terrain will help in training, and ditto a mix of riding conditions. Try and get out in the rain, because there's a good chance you'll experience poor weather on your tour. These practice rides will help keep you rolling when the going gets tough.

Slowly increasing your daily mileage helps build your child's endurance. This is where bike set-up and little things like bar-ends are so crucial. A child's natural instinct is to ride fast from the start; during training, I made Robert understand that we weren't bullet trains speeding to the finish, but rather diesel freight locomotives maintaining a relentless, steady, unstoppable momentum all the way.

In your planning, you'll have selected quiet, traffic-free routes where possible, but necessity dictates sometimes venturing on to busier roads and through towns, so build some urban riding into your training.

Problem solving is essential too. Get your youngster to help with puncture repairs, chain offs and brake adjustments. Get lost and use maps to find your way back on course. Simulate things that might happen in an emergency. What are they going to do? Formulate an 'escape policy' for your child to follow if something should happen to you. Finally, carefully test your child's upper limit. You need to know what they've got in the tank in the event of getting lost or a problem occurring.





On the ride

Above all, it's meant to be fun. To make sure it is, you should always ride at the rear to shield your child from traffic approaching from behind. Position yourself at least six inches to the right of your child's rear wheel. Your bike, loaded with panniers, is a rolling barrier that motorists have to slow for and pass with caution. Make yourselves as visible as possible. We wore bright clothing and I attached to my bike a fluorescent orange flag on a tall, flexible pole. I even added an A5-size sign thanking motorists for their patience, which really helped.

Keep chatting. I chatted constantly to Robert; I'd talk to him about his position in the road, warn of obstacles, junctions and roundabouts, describing in advance how we were going to tackle them. I'd point out landmarks and, on quieter roads, advise on when it was OK to ride two abreast. Robert talked to me about his life and how he viewed the world.

Take plenty of rest. When I rode my End to End, I happily spent up to six hours in the saddle without a break. When touring with kids, you need to take lots of rest stops, even if it's just for a minute or two. Ride for no more than an hour without a break; half-hour stints are even better. These pit-stops will keep your youngster motivated. If you see something interesting, stop.

Pack some Haribo. Of all the tools and equipment you need, sweets are an absolute must. Haribo enhances your powers of gentle coercion. This is going to be the most wonderful adventure for you both, but there will be tough times, and chastisement won't ever work. Encouragement and praise, on the other hand, will be worth many miles.

Robert liked me to keep him updated about our speed and the mileage covered. My cycle computer was invaluable in this regard, providing the data to motivate him. On long climbs in the Snowdonia National Park, he asked me to give him notifications of every half-mile we covered. It broke down the toughness of the ascents, mentally, into manageable chunks.

The greatest motivator of all was granting responsibility. Ask your child which road they think is best; get them to set up the tent while you pretend to do something else. Get them cooking. It doesn't matter if this turns out to be a disaster — it can be rectified later. What matters is the confidence and the feeling of importance that these tasks engender. After all, this is an enormous part of why you're doing this in the first place.

End



I promise you son, we'll soon
be cooking with gas

Northern grit

The ultimate test of leg power and mental fortitude, you don't need to be mad to enter the 112-mile Etape du Dales... but it definitely helps

Words James Shrubsall **Photos** Daniel Gould

How to get there

Threshfield can be approached from the north or south on the M6 or A1(M) motorways — it lies midway between the two. Leave the M6 at jct9 and take the M65 to Colne, continue to Skipton and then turn north on the B6265 to Threshfield. Alternatively, from the A1(M), exit at jct47 and take the A59 past Harrogate to Skipton, where you head north on the B6265 to Threshfield. **Nearest National Rail:** Skipton (nine miles from Threshfield).

HEADS UP

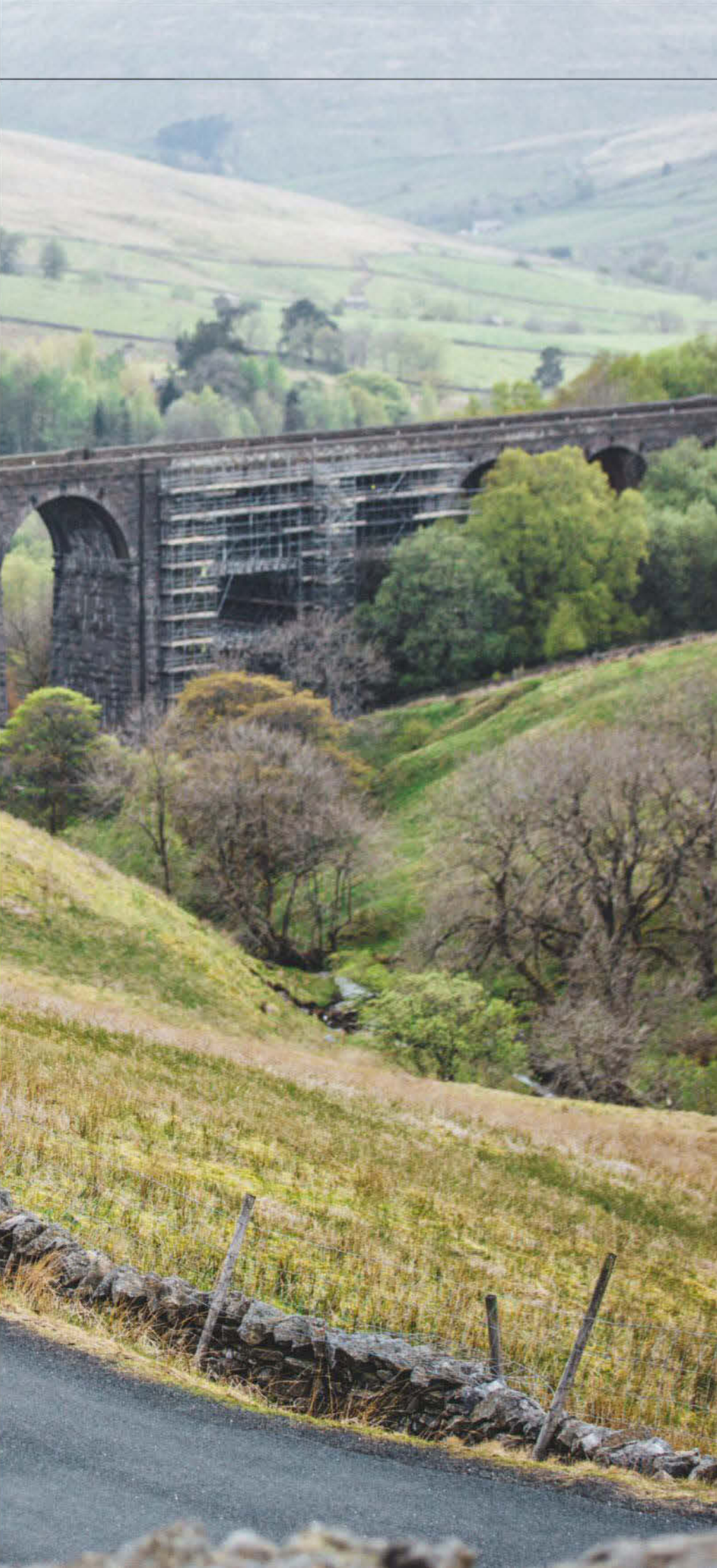
A sportive with pedigree and a serious amount of climbing, set in the beautiful Yorkshire Dales

Distance: 112 miles

Big hills: 8

Challenge: ★★★★★

Feed stops: 4



It's six am, and the view from the window of my basic, but warm and cosy B&B room is, frankly, bleak. The wind is bending boughs and the colour of the sky would make 'slate grey' look cheerful. This is North Yorkshire. It might be God's Country, but right now I'd be happy to stay indoors.

Nevertheless, 40 minutes later we're in the van, bound for the popular market town of Grassington and the start of the 2015 Etape du Dales. If getting up and out while the rest of the world still hugs its warm pillow is half the battle when it comes to cycling events, the first hurdle has already been conquered. But the Etape du Dales is one of the hardest challenge rides on the UK calendar, and I suspect there will be plenty more hurdles to overcome today.

Something of an unsung gem, the Etape du Dales was among the first events to be established when cyclo-sportives were still the new thing rather than the done thing. Organised by the Dave Rayner Fund, which sends talented young riders to pursue their racing careers abroad, it has tended to play the bridesmaid to the better known Fred Whitton Challenge. At the same distance and run on similar roads to the Etape du Dales, the 'Fred' is widely held to be the hardest sportive in the UK. Its coup de grace in the form of the Hardknott and Wrynose pass double is notorious for breaking legs and spirits, and it's a bucket list favourite with UK riders.

If the Fred is the hardest, the Etape is a strong candidate for runner-up, and it has pedigree that few can match. It should be on the 'to do' list of any bike rider who enjoys pitting mind against legs against gravity against terrain.

But having left Grassington in a group of 20 after a briefing from British Cycling's Jonny Clay and wave and a "good ride" from Yorkshire's own Tour star, Brian Robinson, there is little hint of things to come. The group chats easily as we spin blithely northwards on gently rolling lanes, flanked by drystone walls and grazing sheep.

We have well and truly entered the gateway to the Yorkshire Dales now, so much so were we to look back, we'd only just be able to make it out, swinging slowly but inexorably shut with a sinister creak. Every mile that we put under our tyres at this stage

reveals a little more of the challenge that lies in wait. The bough-bending wind that was so apparent upon drawing the curtains on the day begins to tug meaningfully at our sides, while even more ominous is the enormous land mass that is starting to reveal itself in the distance. That would be the day's main dish then, including the climbs of Fleet Moss, Buttertubs pass, Tan Hill and Garsdale Head.

Through Kettlewell — visited last year by the Tour de France — and Starborton, we follow the River Wharfe and the Dales Path.

Past Buckden and into Langstrothdale the chat quietens, perhaps in anticipation of what we're about to ride into, perhaps in awe of the beauty of our surroundings. It's big scenery; high crags and chaotic drystone walls running amok through hay meadows, and the River Wharfe's rocky flow bisecting it all. Such is the final, pastoral reverie the Etape du Dales affords riders before you plunge irrevocably skywards and into the realms of on-bike suffering, with little in the way of respite this side of the finish line.

Leaving the valley floor behind, we huck up over an appetiser before starting the main course of Fleet Moss. It's a brutal, unrelenting gradient, averaging nearly 10 per cent and topping out nearer 20 after 1.7 miles of climbing.

Now that we've left the comparative shelter of the valleys

Preparation tips

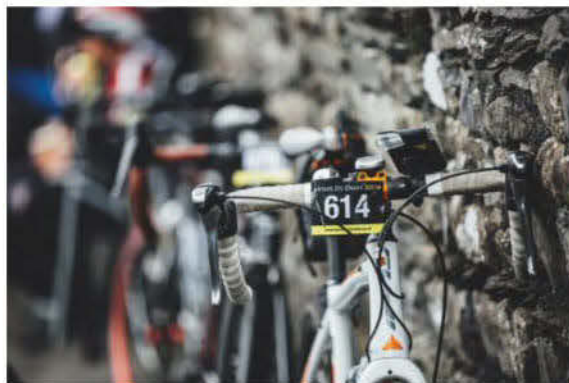
The rider info on the Etape du Dales website has one pointed nugget of advice: "Respect the challenge".

It's not the kind of the thing you read often in sportive bumf, but in this case it's more than merited. The underlying message is that you need to make sure you're in shape for this ride.

If you're a sportive novice, you'll need at least three months of structured riding, including plenty of hill work and at least a couple of outings of 75-80 miles plus. If you can fit one or two challenge events in along the way then so much the better.

Even seasoned riders will need to be on top of their game for the EDD. If you've not done a proper 'long' ride in a while, make sure you fit a couple in during the lead-up to the event. And like the novices, ensure you have plenty of hill work in your legs too. The Dales hills really are not to be taken lightly.

It also goes without saying that if you're carrying a bit of ballast, then losing a kilo or two for the event will stand you in good stead.



Above top: Bicycles and drystone walls were the order of the day

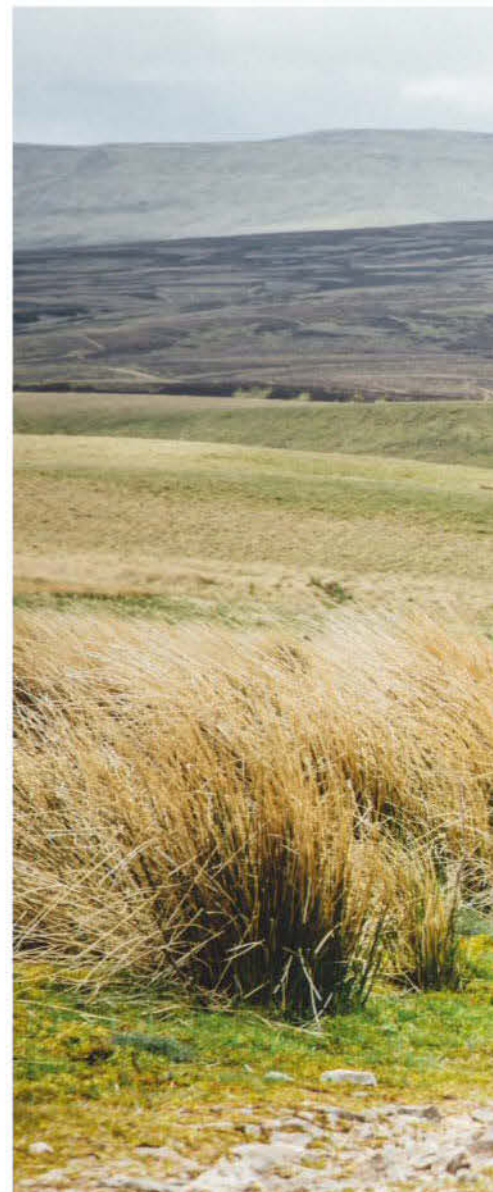
Above middle: The Tan Hill Inn: not many pubs have their own snowmobiles

Above: Grateful riders issued with cake atop Tan Hill

behind, the full intent of the wind makes itself known, and what would usually be a roaring, high-speed descent sees riders timidly feathering brakes as our bikes become playthings of the weather.

If descents are your bag though, and the wind plays ball, this will be a highlight of the ride. It's steep and very nearly straight and it'd be almost difficult not to exceed 50mph down here. Being safety conscious kinda guys though, don't accuse us of encouraging it.

At the bottom, the small town of Hawes allows a brief respite, not to mention a glimpse of the Wensleydale cheese factory, before it's time to tackle Buttertubs pass. This climb was made famous last year when the



Tour de France passed through and ostentatiously re-named it the Côte de Buttertubs, but it's about as French as bread and dripping, and has Yorkshire written all over it. The road starts to climb almost imperceptibly, particularly because unless you've done your homework you would scarcely imagine that ride organisers would hit you with another humdinger so soon. Wrong! Stealthy as an alleycat, the route taps us on the shoulder and suddenly the few of us that remain from that group of 20 that left Grassington nearly two hours ago are all in bottom gear, grinding the pedals up a vertiginous ramp.

It's a lengthy slog that, by the time it tops out after nearly four miles of climbing from Hawes, has elevated us almost 300 metres vertically.

By this time you are fully immersed in the moors, and you get the feeling that if you went back in time a thousand years, only the tarmac of the road and the odd drystone wall would be missing from the scene.

The descent that follows is a thing of beauty; steep, brakes-off ramps,

"Côte de Buttertubs was so named when the Tour passed through Yorkshire last year — but it's about as French as bread and dripping"



sweeping bends and, if you dare to look up for a second, some of the best scenery the UK has to offer. And with nearly five miles of solid downhill, be prepared for a thorough test of bike handling, brake pads and nerve, too.

An uncharacteristically straightforward few miles of steady riding follows, and we're treated to one of the few sections of tailwind we're to experience today as we meander through the wonderfully bucolic Swaledale. It's not completely flat, more rolling, but the respite from steep gradients and howling crosswinds is welcome. It's predictably shortlived though, and, taking a left fork in the pretty hamlet of Feetham, the road ramps once again into double black arrows territory for the haul up onto Feetham Pasture.

Determined to leave no stone unturned in the quest to put riders to the test, the route throws in a slippery ford on a corner at the bottom of a hill, although to give organisers their due, a bell-ringing marshal gives

plenty of warning and points out the footbridge, which I use without hesitating. Getting wet through — let alone injured — at this stage of the ride would spell disaster.

A brace of short, sharp hucks lead us to the bottom of the Tan Hill climb. Long, but not especially steep, in clement conditions Tan Hill wouldn't be a huge test for a reasonably fit rider. On this day though, the howling westerly blows directly into our faces

Above: Bleak, barren and blustery: perfect conditions for cyclists to test their mettle

as we start the climb, and even the mountain goats among us are slowed to a crawl. I find my '32' sprocket has never been more welcome, although my progress is a painfully slow sub-5mph. Even the sheep look unimpressed.

If ever there was an appropriate use of 'interminable', Tan Hill on this day is it. Simon Warren's Official 100 Climbs Strava segment puts the distance at 6.2 miles, and the fastest time is less than 20 minutes. It takes me nearly an hour. The going is featureless and barren, with only the odd humped bridge over a beck to break up the monotony and turn the screw on your quads.

You're not even rewarded with a particularly spectacular view at the top — just miles of moorland, fringed by a very distant panorama. There is a pub though — the Tan Hill Inn is the highest in England, no less — and if you've ever earned yourself the right to imbibe 568 millilitres of cool amber replenishment, it's now. On the other hand, you might decide to shun a cold pint in favour of the tea, coffee, »





sandwiches and cake available in the side room. I do just that, and as I step inside the volume drops instantly from 11 to 1 as the roar of the wind is suddenly silenced.

The sojourn at the Tan Hill Inn is followed by another superb Yorkshire Dales descent. Typically well surfaced and almost traffic free, it's a tarmac ribbon that sweeps lazily downwards across the moors, and as it approaches the bottom of the valley, gets rather exciting thanks to a one-in-four section that coincides with a hamlet and a series of tight bends. It's a nice flourish.

Unfortunately it's also west facing, and the unrelenting headwind forces us to pedal downhill, and even then it's a genuine struggle to break 12mph, even on the steep parts. It's not something I've ever experienced before, and I'll be more than happy never to do so again. Only as I get lower down and into a bit of shelter does the speed pick up a bit.

With the most northerly tip of the ride at Nateby now in sight,

Above: Spectacular as the scenery may be, the sportivists make haste... blinkered by their own pain and fatigue

Below: An early-morning roll-out from Wharfedale Rugby Club

and despite the fact my complaining legs are starting to find hump-back bridges a challenge, I make the easy mistake of allowing complacency to creep in. It doesn't seem hugely misplaced at first, as the road meanders mazily through a pretty valley beside the River Swale. I'm just on the verge on deciding that it's all rather idyllic, when the valley sides open out and the road starts to rise. Within a mile I find myself winching up the side of yet another steep and

exposed hill, wind howling in my face.

The wind having foiled any attempt to enjoy yet another fine descent, we reach Nateby and we're finally past the halfway mark of the ride. This is no 'home straight' though, and the road south is littered with biting undulations that continue for the next 10 miles, all the way to the third feed station at Moorcock.

Replenished once more with cake and energy drink I leave the feed and shortly find myself enjoying an ever-so-slightly downhill meander through sheltered, pretty Garsdale. With fresh legs, this would be easy pottering, but with those currently attached to my torso, every tenth of a mile is hard, and I will them past, one by one — or try not to look at my Garmin until I've covered what I estimate to be a mile at least.

I'm suddenly struck by the thought that there are very few other riders around. None, in fact. For quite a while. The realisation dawns black: I've gone off course. Resisting the strong urge to bawl I pull out the route map and assess the damage.





morosely. A smattering of colourful villages allow a little cheer though, particularly Stainforth, where I meet with a feed station totally unexpectedly. It's the final one. I Hoover up cake like I'm getting ready to hibernate, and when I'm done even the prospect of yet another climb doesn't faze me. With a little over 15 miles left to ride and only one hill left this can, after all, legitimately be referred to as the 'home stretch'. Well thank Christ.

Silverdale is no walk in the park though. From its open salvo of near-20 per cent ramps to the torturous crawl across the top, climbing ever upward in the shadow of the forboding, angular mass of Pen-y-Ghent.

The reward is yet another well-surfaced, long and traffic-free descent, with only the odd cattle grid to temper the exhilaration as the road plummets to the valley floor. At the bottom, we turn south for the last time and the wind is finally a friend once more as it sweeps us through Littondale and on to the final few flat miles back to HQ.



RIDE HQ

Wharfedale Rugby Club Threshfield, Skipton, North Yorkshire BD23 5DS
www.wharfedalerufc.co.uk

PLACES TO STAY

Grassington House Hotel
Luxury accommodation right on the doorstep of ride HQ
5 The Square, Grassington, North Yorkshire BD23 5AQ
www.grassingtonhousehotel.co.uk
01756 752406
From £120 for a double room

The Craven Heifer

B&B pub situated at the 'gateway to the dales'
Grassington Road, Skipton, North Yorkshire BD23 3LA
www.cravenheifer.co.uk / 01756 792521
From £59.95 for a double or twin room



ROAD BOOK

1. Turn left out of the car park, then right by the sweetshop and up Wood Lane. In Conistone turn right and take narrow lane to Kettlewell. Continue up valley to Buckden.
2. Turn left, valley route through Hubberholme, Beckermonds and Oughtershaw then over Fleet Moss to Hawes.
3. Turn right, then at bottom of town turn left signed

- Hardraw. Left at T-junction then right over Buttermere.
4. Right at bottom and follow valley to Low Row. Turn left and over un-named climb and through water splash.
5. Left at bottom and long climb to Tan Hill. Turn left at pub. Descend and undulating to T-junction.
6. Turn right and over Mallerstang to Nateby. Turn left and gentle climb up valley to Garsdale Head and Moorcock Inn.
7. Turn right then left past station and over Coal Road. Left at bottom and up to Newby Head.

8. Turn right and fast run down to Ribblesdale. Turn left signed Settle. Through Horton-in-Ribblesdale to Stainforth.
9. Turn left past car park then left again signed Halton Gill. Climb and then undulating past Pen-y-gent, then descend to Halton Gill. Climbing is now finished.
10. Follow road around to right and down valley through Linton and Arncliffe.
11. At end of valley turn right, go past Kilnsey and into Threshfield. Turn left back to Grassington.

An ode to the Wayfarer

Short, sharp, and wildly compelling: that's the Wayfarer rough stuff ride in North Wales

Words and photos Steve Thomas

Great British mountain passes; I bet we could all name a handful at best, although many of them may well end up on the unpronounceable list.

But how many of these steep and winding roads of pain, each of them bottom bracket-deep in cycling history and tradition, can you think of that are actually named after a cyclist?

Well, there is one such pass. And while it still officially carries its tongue twisting, double-barrelled Welsh name, is more commonly known by the name of a cyclist, or perhaps I should say a cycling figure of old: the Wayfarer.

It may well also be a name that you see painted on the side of a passing bus, on a pair of sunglasses or on a bag of tasteless dehydrated camping food. But Wayfarer is also the unofficial title of a mountain pass in the remote Berwyn Mountains of North Wales.

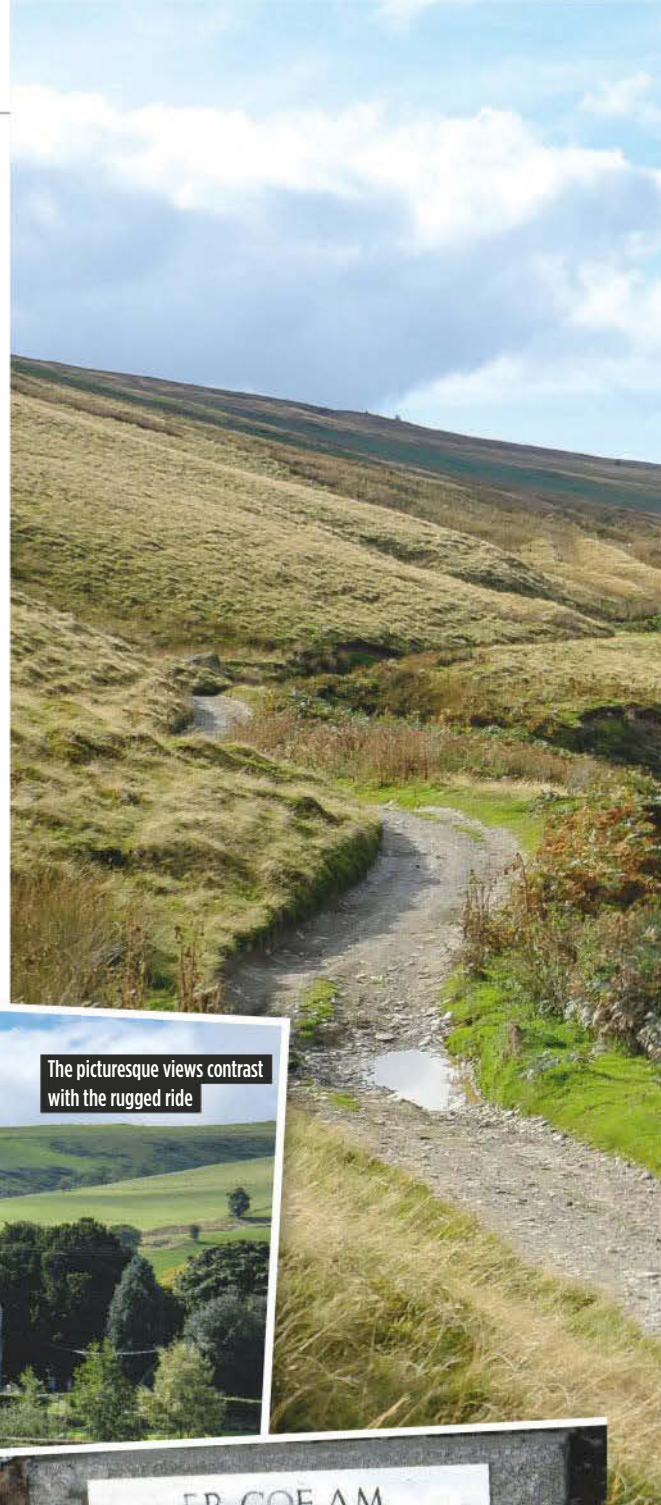
Small print in official documentation lists this rough and ready pass as Nant Rhyd Wilym, although you'd struggle to find anybody that would be able to tell you that. To all and sundry, including the locals, this particular high and windswept track is and will always be known as the Wayfarer, having assumed its title from former cycling journalist Walter McGregor Robinson, a Liverpoolian who wrote under the pen name of the Wayfarer.

It was just after the Great War that Robinson started taking on epic mountain rides around the country and writing about them in the cycling press of the day. One of his finest and most alluring exploits was a late winter crossing of this pass, and thus with his passing his title was fittingly adopted by the pass he'd made famous. Ever since then it has been a ride of

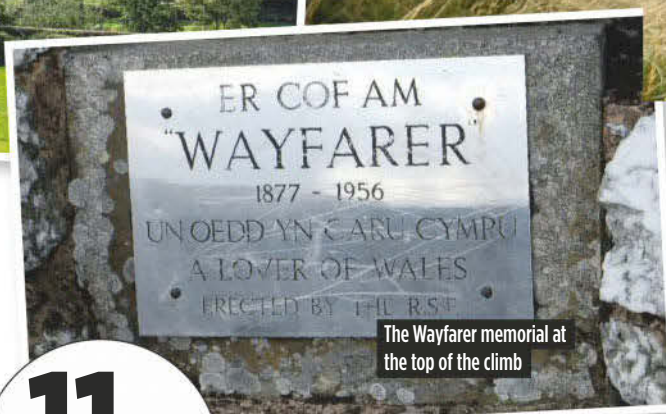
pilgrimage for cyclists, especially Merseysiders, who often take on the challenge of this punishing ride either as part of a long day out, or more often as a weekend hostelling trip.

Make no mistake about it, this is not a ride for skinny tyres and carbon horses — the Wayfarer is the original definition of a rough stuff ride, which is why it's also of hallowed status within chapters of the Rough Stuff Fellowship, the original go-anywhere bearded hardmen of cycling.

In recent times the route has also become a prime old-school mountain biking classic, and with good reason. It's wild, rugged, challenging, and has a defined sense of epic about it. The regular mountain bike approach to the ride is to take on a 35-mile grand tour of the Berwyn Mountains, which is one seriously big day out, and one you need



The picturesque views contrast with the rugged ride



The Wayfarer memorial at the top of the climb

11.5 miles

to be well prepared for, as you're on your own once you get past the first few miles of riding.

A more traditional approach to the ride is to attempt it on a touring, or even a cyclo-cross, bike which is exactly what I did this time around. Having undertaken it many times before on a mountain bike, this skinny-wheeled attempt was a whole new experience for me, and acted as

HEADS UP

A rough, rugged trail to the top of a Welsh pass that takes its name from a cycling journalist

Distance: 11.5 miles

Big hills: 1

Challenge: ★★★★★

Cafe stops: 1



“This is not a ride for skinny tyres and carbon horses — the Wayfarer is the definition of a rough stuff ride”

my own mini pilgrimage and tribute to W.G. Robinson.

Blessed with a superbly dry and sunny afternoon and armed with semi-slick tyres, I set off from the village of Llanarmon DC, a tiny and picturesque outpost in the middle of some of the finest and most unspoilt countryside in Britain. Like most Welsh villages it also has two great pubs, though unfortunately this time around I was not going to get my reward for conquering the Wayfarer in a glass — the trail had other ideas for a final shot.

Despite the great weather I had the afternoon almost all to myself, which is not unusual in these parts. »

Top: Nant Rhyd Wilym is the traditional Welsh name for the climb



STOP!



PUBS AND GRUB

The Hand, Llanarmon DC, LL20 7LD,
Open from 11am-11pm daily

Tel: 01691 600666

www.thehandhotel.co.uk

West Arms, Llanarmon DC, LL20 7LD.

Opens regular licensing hours

Tel: 01691 600665

www.thewestarms.com

BIKE SHOPS

There are no bike shops near the climb;
the closest is in Oswestry, which is 10
miles away.

Stuart Barkley Cycles

Salop Road (on the main car park),

Oswestry. Open 8.45am-5.30pm daily

(closed Sunday). Tel 01691 658705

www.oswestrycycles.co.uk

Following a sweet and smooth ride down the road to the valley head I hit the rough stuff with a vengeance. After so many years away from this pass, I felt a sense of uncertainty, unsure if I would actually be able to tackle it on skinny wheels.

Less than 200 metres into the trail and I stopped to open the gate that marks the end of the lead-in and the start of the true rattling and rolling. At the same time two off-road motorbikes came by in the opposite direction. One rider pulled me over with a concerned and bemused look and warned me that this was no ride for a nice bike like that. I grinned like a madman and thanked him, and then carried on into the wilds.

Just seconds later and the doubletrack wound out into the open valley. The trail was climbing steadily but surely away from the sanity of the road below. With the gate still in sight I pulled over to take a few pictures, only to notice I had a flat tyre and, as it turns out, a punctured spare tube, too. It looked as though my mission was doomed to fail before it had even started, but luckily I found some stick-on patches in my seat pack and the day was saved.

Gently winding around the valley I picked my way neatly between the rocks and ruts for what seemed like an eternity. Water splashes, wooden decking, sheep-sized holes and mini boulders marked the second half of the climb, yet despite being close to my reserve bottom granny gear it was all under control, although I couldn't help but wonder how the heck I was going to get down it in one piece.

With the summit almost in sight, the trail bit steeply and twisted like a greased breakdancer. The rocks got bigger, the camber swerved in all directions and I fought to keep traction. Finally I gave best and hopped off for a few metres, then it was back on to tame this great beast.

By the time I reached the summit it



“Winding around the valley, I neatly picked my way between the rocks and ruts for what seemed like an eternity”

was already late afternoon. The wind was howling and the clouds were swirling; I figured I'd best get back over those rocks before they got wet.

Not too slowly — and probably not too surely, either — I rattled and jarred my way down from the mountain. The job was almost done and dusted and I began to relax. Perhaps somewhat inevitably came the lapse in concentration. There it was, in slow motion and heading straight at my face: a melon-sized boulder.

It's strange that when these things happen you either know nothing about it, or you get every detail and thinking time on the way down. Somehow I had that fraction of a second to decide between a potential broken collarbone or a banged head, and so I pitched for the head-plant.

The crack as my helmet hit the rock went straight through me. Damn, wrong decision I thought, but by the grace of that foam and plastic I had

The Berwyn Mountains are remote and wild

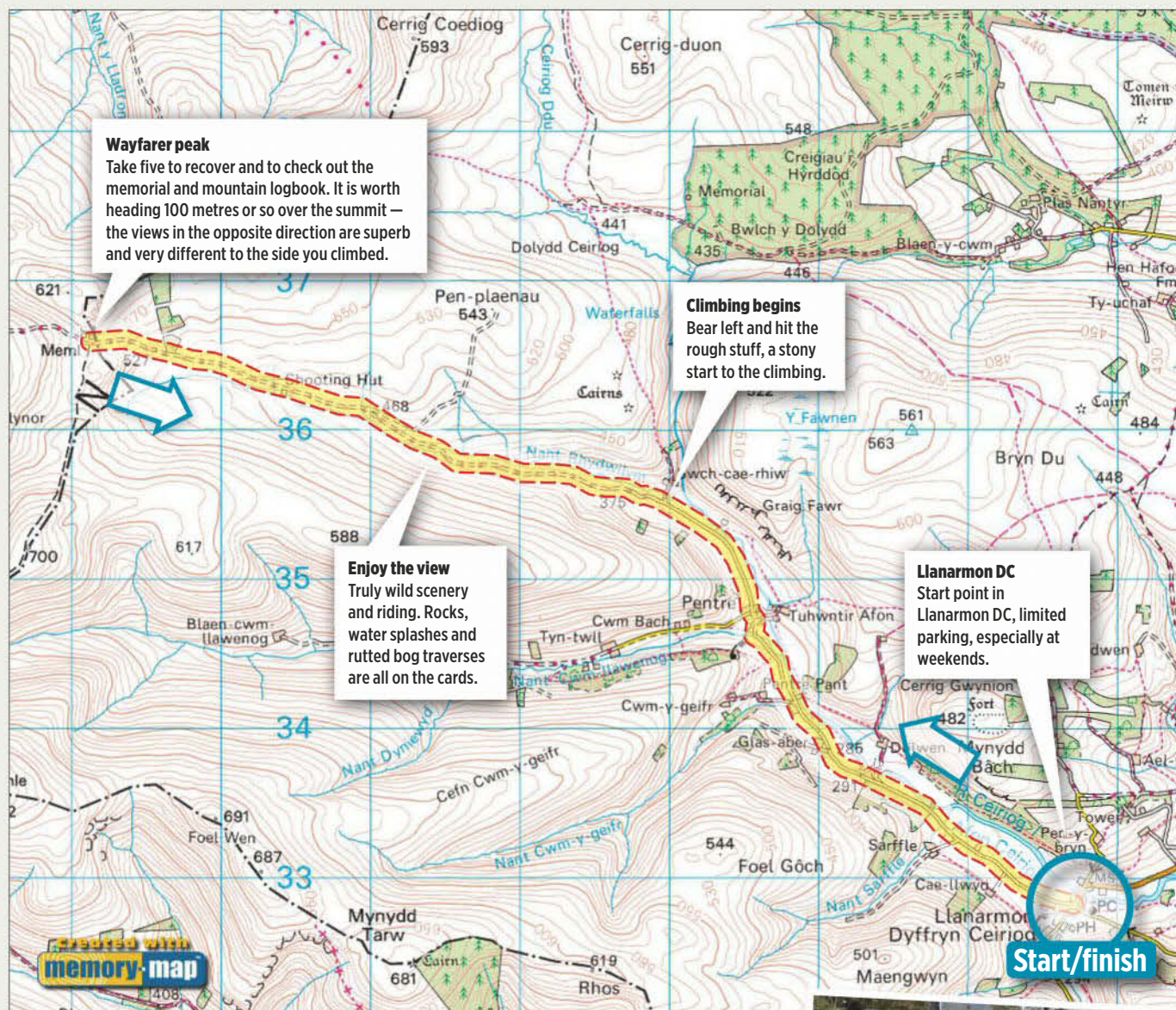


Top: Rough stuff it certainly is on this uphill trail

Your tyres will need to be robust on a ride like this



nothing more than a smudged face and a slight sense of shock. “Shaken but not stirred,” as Bond might say, and I wouldn't have missed a second of the ride either. Well, OK, maybe I'd have skipped the whack on the head... **End**



ROAD BOOK

Starting from the tiny village of Llanarmon DC (Dyffryn Ceiriog), take the minor road westbound between the buildings just a few metres from the main village square (north). Follow this narrow and flat road as it meanders down the valley. After a while the road turns right and leads into a farmyard, which is the end of the road.

At this point go through the farm gate directly ahead of you, and then follow the rocky trail up through the trees. This trail climbs up and onto a rugged and rolling trail that traverses the valley side, before crossing a stream and boggy ground.

Following a steep and rocky climb you reach the summit, where you'll find the Wayfarer memorial and the mountain log.

At this point our route retraces back down the valley to the start point.

If you have favourable weather then you could continue your ride over the summit and on to either Llandrillo or Cynwyd, both of which have a pub and small shop for you to stop. However, this is a tough option that doubles the distance of the ride.

The Wayfarer pass got its name from a cycling journalist



Riders can fill out the log book at the summit



A slice of the Lakes

Cath Harris visits Langdale for a ride among the sumptuous Lakeland contours

Words Cath Harris Photos Margaret Harris

HEADS UP

A short but hilly route and all the more stunning for the effort

Distance: 8.9 miles

Big hills: 1

Challenge: ★★☆☆☆

Cafe stops: 1



**8.9
miles**



Towering Lakeland peaks dwarf a quaint settlement

Stop a while, cock an ear and you can almost hear the rumble. Touch your brakes, put toe to turf and you might just sense the judder of crashing landscapes and spewing volcanoes that created the beautiful and mesmerising Lake District 450 million years ago. This National Park, all 885 square miles of it, is one of Britain's most spectacular panoramas in which to cycle. Or hike, paraglide or simply gaze from the window of a cozy pub or tea shop. In fact, there's little not to like about the region boasting England's highest summit, deepest and longest lakes and a maze of little-used lanes beckoning those on two wheels. Its mountains are "surpassed by none," wrote William Wordsworth whose 1815 poem 'Daffodils' paid homage, while fell-walker Alfred Wainwright lovingly detailed the 214 peaks now energetically bagged by pilgrims in his wake. Beatrix Potter was another incomer to find contentment in Cumbria but hers was a more earthy enthusiasm: aside from writing tales and studying fungi, Potter was a

champion of the region's doughty and inquisitive Herdwick sheep.

It is those hardy animals that scatter the fells either side of the Great Langdale Valley, the glorious setting for our ride. It is an undulating circuit well away from any town. Beyond the New Dungeon Ghyll Hotel, the popular start point for the testing scramble up the 736m Langdale Pikes, there is little but farmland and fell, and the occasional shepherd and his dog. There is one tough climb before a see-sawing return via two idyllic tarns either side of the daunting Wrynose Pass. Tackle this detour if you're feeling feisty but do so only with legs and lungs highly tuned.

Jumble of stone and slate

We start at the Co-op and Brambles cafe in Chapel Stile, the small village that heads the valley. The village is a jumble of stone and slate houses typical of the Lake District. At its centre is a 150-year-old church with attractive stained glass windows and a millennium tapestry depicting history

unfolding. Bell-ringers sound a peal each Sunday morning. On other days, the hoots of young children at the village school opposite and occasional mews from circling buzzards searching for carrion are the only sounds. We climb gently and within half a mile are treated to our first views of the U-shaped Langdale basin. To our right is Langdale Edge, the cascade of fells bumping from the craggy Langdale summits forming the centrepiece of this glacially carved trough. The nearest slopes hide the stepping stone peaks of Silver How, Swinescar Pike and eventually Sergeant Man, which peers deferentially at Pavey Ark, the sinister rockface sheltering Stickle Tarn on the north-eastern side of the Langdale Pikes.

"No mountain profile arrests and



STOP!



PUBS AND GRUB

Brambles Cafe, Langdale Co-op, Chapel Stile, Great Langdale, Ambleside LA22 9JE; 01539 457500

New Dungeon Ghyll Hotel, Great Langdale, Ambleside LA22 9JX; 01539 437213; www.dungeon-ghyll.co.uk
Britannia Inn, Elterwater, Ambleside, Cumbria LA22 9HP; 01539 437210; www.thebritanniainn.com

BIKE SHOP

Biketreks, Rydal Rd, Ambleside LA22 9A; 01539 431245; www.bike-treks.co.uk



The Lakes boast some of the UK's most dramatic landscapes

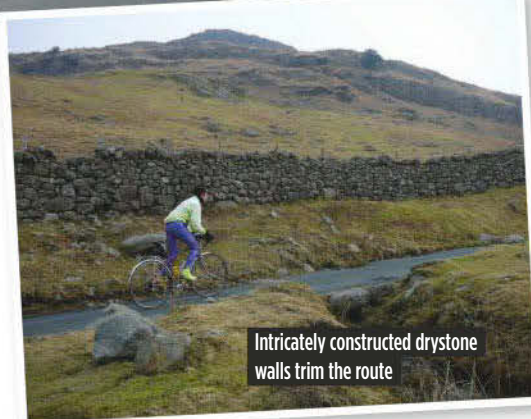
excites the attention more than that of the Langdale Pikes and no mountain group better illustrates the dramatic appeal of a sudden rising of the vertical from the horizontal," wrote Wainwright. The Victorians appreciated the sight too, if only from their carriages, regularly travelling to valley hotels for tea, ham and eggs.

Here be Herdwicks

Refreshment is now less traditional at the new and old Dungeon Ghyll hotels but if you're ready for an early stop, both can arm you for the arduous climb ahead. Both overlook the valley floor, a jigsaw of drystone walls enclosing farmland pierced by the Great Langdale Beck. This meandering stream flows from Stickle Tarn through the valley and into the River Brathay, which trickles on to Windermere. The tarn was created to power a gunpowder works but the hard basalt stone forming the adjacent spikes — Harrison Stickle, Loft Crag and Pike of Stickle — has a much older manufacturing history: it was used to make axe heads thousands of years ago. Fragments from this ancient weapons factory are sometimes found in the scree around the tarn.

Occasional whitewashed farmhouses dot the roadside. They are waterproofed with limewash and many are repainted annually. Stone barns house thick-coated cattle grabbing hungrily at large bales of hay. It is the Herdwicks that are more prevalent here though; their grazing has shaped Cumbrian landscapes for centuries. Herdwicks are native to the Lake District and are the hardiest of our hill sheep. After moving from London, Beatrix Potter became their champion, breeding these stocky animals on some of her 17 Lakeland farms. In 1944, had she lived, Potter would have been the first female president of the Herdwick Sheep Breeders' Association, which still thrives today. The name Herdwick comes from the Old Norse word 'herdvýck', meaning sheep pasture.

Riding on we reach a T-junction and the



Intricately constructed drystone walls trim the route

end of road access to the valley. Public footpaths follow Mickleden and Oxendale becks towards snow-streaked Crinkle Crag and 902m Bow Fell — the National Park's sixth highest peak. We turn sharply left and our route winds innocently at first before crossing a cattle grid marking the start of a precarious and twisting climb. Heather and bracken-clad fells open out either side; drystone walls streak the hillsides, meeting remnants of ice still clinging to gullies and shadowed crags. The walls divide farmland but also clear fields of stones. Those on the hills enclose 'in-take' fields — land 'taken' from the fell — while the walls in the valley separate 'in-bye' land.

Great Langdale

We're down to our lowest gears for the steep but short ascent around Side Pike and the western end of Lingmoor Fell. This hillside splits the Great and Little Langdale valleys and is named after the heather on its slopes — 'lyng' being another Old Norse word, meaning heather-covered. Views ahead and behind are ample excuse for a breather at the top. Dropping below is the Little Langdale Valley, a hanging valley whose floor is higher than that of its bigger sister. Beyond are the Tibberthwaite High Fells and further still, the fells looking up to Conistoun.



Climbing into the clouds on precipitous lanes

"Heather and bracken-clad fells open up either side and drystone walls streak the hillsides"

Much nearer are the calm waters of Blea Tarn, whose bed has been undisturbed since the Ice Age. It and the area around it are a Site of Special Scientific Interest. There's a National Trust car park here and an easy walk around the tarn. Pushing on, we reach the Wrynose Pass turning after a succession of short climbs and drops. Just beyond is Little Langdale Tarn and the hamlet of Little Langdale where you might spot a red squirrel. Farmer and smuggler Lanty Sleet lived here in the 1850s, distilling whisky in caves and quarries and transporting it by pack horse over Wrynose to Ravenglass on the west coast.

We drop down a second 25 per cent drop and another lesser descent before turning north to Elterwater. Moss covers the drystone walls hemming the lane and the rocks and stones in woodlands. We climb gently past the Eltermere Inn and on into Elterwater Village where a dipper whirrs beneath the bridge over the River Rathay. Dippers favour fast flowing streams such as this and have the unusual ability among perching birds (as opposed to water birds) in being able to walk, swim and hunt for food underwater.

Most Elterwater houses are holiday cottages and the village shop has been closed for some years. The Britannia Inn is buoyant, however, and draws cyclists, walkers and day trippers enjoying the gravelled Cumbria Way running alongside the river. We have a choice of routes here — continue on tarmac or take a quarry road just before the bridge. We do the latter, climbing above the Langdale Hotel built on the gunpowder factory site. As the road turns into the quarry we hop off our bikes down a loosely slated public footpath which leads over a footbridge to the road. Wainwright's Inn is on the left and is a temptation. More enticing though are the generous wedges of cake at Brambles Cafe around the corner.

End



ROAD BOOK

From Brambles Cafe in Chapel Stile follow the B5343 north-west into the Great Langdale Valley. Turn left at a T-junction at almost three miles. Cross a cattle grid and climb steeply for about 700m (in distance). The road undulates for 3.5

miles passing two right turns. Continue straight on to a T-junction. Turn left signed Elterwater. At Elterwater bridge carry straight on to the B5343 turning left to Chapel Stile, or turn left just before the bridge and follow the quarry road until a public footpath is signed on the right. The path drops steeply to the river bank. Continue across a footbridge to the road, turning left to Chapel Stile.



Island hopping in the Hebrides

A collection of interconnected islands with seafood, spectacular scenery and mixed terrain makes the Outer Hebrides perfect for a cycle touring adventure

Words Hannah Reynolds Photos John Walsh



You don't have to fly long haul to experience clear seas and golden sand. Our own archipelago of islands, 60 miles off the coast of mainland Scotland, offer beaches to rival the Caribbean, though unfortunately not always the weather to match.

Our journey to the Outer Hebrides began by train from Glasgow to Oban. We weren't the only cyclists on the train and judging by the number of well worn rucksacks and walking poles stuffed into the baggage compartments there were plenty of people with adventurous plans.

As the scenery got wilder and more dramatic the train gradually emptied out. On arrival in Oban, a dribble of passengers, including the other two

cyclists, left the train to pedal to the ferry port. Around the port there are plenty of freshly caught seafood market stands offering everything from big fat scallops to crab, prawn and mussels. A huge pan of mussels was being cooked over an open stove. The cook casually lifted the lid and added a bottle of Lambrini! Cooking wine is one thing, but Lambrini? I've never seen the favourite drink of teenage girls used to flavour a dish before.

Boat and bike

The plan for the trip was to use our Calmac Ferries 'Island Hopping' ticket to cycle from Barra, the most southern of the Outer Hebrides islands, through Uist, Harris and Lewis returning by ferry from

Main: Views to rival anywhere in the world, though sadly not the weather
Opposite top: Stay on the left, Hannah, you're still in the UK!
Opposite middle: Well, it would be rude not to pay this place a wee visit
Opposite bottom: A touch too much Harris Tweed?
Opposite bottom right: Grappling with the local wildlife

Stornoway to Ullapool on mainland Scotland. This combination of ferries and pedalling allows you to weave your way up the chain of islands. Our plan was to spend a night on each island, a comfortable itinerary but you could easily take considerably longer and still not see everything.

We arrived on Barra just as dusk fell damp and mistily. We picked our way along the narrow roads to reach our first night's accommodation seven miles from the ferry. Given that the road loop of the entire island is only 12 miles that is more than halfway round. It was dark by the time we finally settled down to eat in the restaurant so we missed the view of the rock pools and white sandy beaches below, but a thin silver line could be seen



HEADS UP

A remote island-hopping adventure in the westernmost part of the UK on a mix of roads and byways

Distance: 110 miles

Big hills: 10+

Challenge: ★★★★★

Cafe stops: Plenty of choice



110
miles



“As the scenery became more dramatic, the train gradually emptied out”

picking out the edges of waves on the beach below.

Sadly the next morning dawned damp and grey, but even with the less than perfect conditions the beauty of the coastline could still be seen through a veil of fog. Barra — also known as Barradise thanks to its beaches — is joined by a causeway to the smaller island of Vatersay, but the ferry was calling so after completing a lap of the island it was off Barra and onto our next island adventure.



All in a good causeway

Leaving Barra we headed next to Eriskay, a 40-minute crossing. The SS Politician ship sank off the coast of Eriskay in 1941 with a cargo of whisky on board, which subsequently became the subject of the book, and then film, *Whisky Galore!*

A causeway connects Eriskay to South Uist so it's an easy pedal to leave one island for another. Benbecula lies between South and North Uist. In Gaelic its name is Beinn na Faoghla, meaning mountain of the ford — it is a high hill, a stepping stone between the two other islands. There is now a series of causeways to cross, but before this there would have been treacherous shifting sands for travellers to cross.



“Lost in the reverie, we were surprised to see a trombone player pop out from behind a stone”

The causeway is no wider than the road itself, with tidal waters lapping either side. As we crossed we joined another party of cyclists, so we led a procession of touring bikers across into North Uist.

We stopped overnight on North Uist and with a relatively relaxed ferry time the next morning decided to go the long ride round the island. The day started off well, with a smoked salmon tasting session and a look around a smoking house, but soon after departing we turned into the most horrendous headwind. With my panniers acting like sails I was buffeted from side to side, almost grinding to a halt at times.

With the time ticking away to the ferry departure time it became apparent that without the ‘handicap’ of riding with me the other member of the party would have made the ferry. Despite my best efforts, we arrived in Berneray just in time to see the ferry depart. Thankfully there was a cafe with plenty of tea and unlimited Wi-Fi.

The wait for the ferry put us several hours behind schedule so by the time we arrived on Harris we were against the setting sun. The road to Tarbert is one of the best I have ever ridden. Even with the low evening light on an already overcast day, the sand glowed gold beneath an aquamarine sea. A snapshot of just the sea and sand could as easily be passed off as a Caribbean beach as a Hebridean one.

Rising up away from the coast the road became significantly more challenging, and after that even more taxing, and after that downright difficult. Large rocky boulders lined the roadside, intimidating in their size and blackness as I ground through ever-reducing gears with the road rising upwards ever-steeper. Just at the moment where my mind was about to submit to leg pain, the summit appeared and I managed to roll over the top and descend into Tarbert.



Colour spectrum

In retrospect, of all the islands Harris left the greatest impact. In my memory the beaches are more golden, the sea a deeper blue, the rock more dramatic and the colours of the hillside more striking. We visited Harris Tweed and in the purer, older fabrics these colours can clearly be seen in the material. Like the machair that grows along the shoreline from a distance it is an indistinguishable melange of colour, but up close each flower and leaf is bright and individual, the same as tweed where each thread of the weave carries its own distinct colour.

While waiting outside the tourist information centre we met a gentleman who admired our bikes whilst telling us about his own cycling exploits. His strongly Presbyterian neighbours were scandalised that he rode a bike on a Sunday, as this is ‘work’ and therefore forbidden. His wife he said would be frowned at for hanging their washing out on the ‘day of rest’. There is still a strong Presbyterian tradition on all of the Hebridean Islands but it was hard to know how much he was exaggerating.

From Harris we moved on to Lewis, heading to the west coast to visit the Callanish Stones. On a slight hill above the village the purpose and origin of the stones is unknown, but their purposeful positioning show they were clearly very important to those who created what

Top left: Hannah takes time to ponder the mysterious Callanish Stones
Top right: Tourist information provides everything, including storytelling old men
Above: Get ready for the rough stuff; Hebridean roads can vary massively!

even now feels like an enigmatic and magical space.

Arriving late evening we had the stones to ourselves and were able to walk slowly around them, peacefully immersed in imagining how they came into being. Lost in the reverie it was something of a shock and surprise to find a trombone player pop out from behind one of the stones. He was swiftly followed by an entire brass band that proceeded to stridently play their instruments. I wouldn’t call this magical but it was certainly unusual.

To complete an Outer Hebridean end-to-end you should really visit the Butt of Lewis but we opted to head straight for Stornoway, our final stop before departing for Ullapool. After the calm and tranquillity we had experienced elsewhere Stornoway felt bustling; motorists were more abundant and in the kind of urgent hurry you normally only experience in cities. A car pulling out of a side road managed to hit me square on and send me flying down the road. The lady who hit me was more traumatised than I was and despite the abrasions on my bike and me, I ended up comforting her and sitting her down on the kerb to recover!

Later that same evening whilst having a medicinal whisky to ease my bruising I received a text saying, “I hope you are OK and this hasn’t put you off visiting Lewis again.” It hasn’t.

End



STOP!



HOW TO TRAVEL

CalMac Ferries offer an island-hopping ticket, allowing travel from Oban-Castlebay, Barra-Eriskey, Berneray-Leverburgh, Stornoway-Ullapool. The ticket is valid for 31 days from day of purchase and is valid on any crossing, so you can be very relaxed about your itinerary. If it is just you and a bike you don't need to book crossings in advance but if you have a vehicle then it is worth booking, especially if you have a strict timetable to stick to as some crossings can be very busy. Island-hopping tickets can be purchased in advance online or for foot passengers at the ferry terminal on the first day of travel. www.calmac.co.uk
Tel: 0800 066 5000

PLACES TO STAY

Isle of Barra Hotel

Arriving in Barra off the ferry it was almost dark, and we joined a procession of disembarking cyclists and followed the taillights up the hill. While the majority stopped almost immediately at Castlebay Hotel, we pressed on a few miles further to reach the Isle of Barra Hotel. While we can't comment on Castlebay Hotel, the scallops at the Isle of Barra Hotel were well worth the extra damp miles of pedalling!

This family-run hotel faces the beach and offers dramatic views overlooking the white sands. It is the most westerly hotel in Britain and the sunsets are spectacular — a slow descent over the sea with rich colours filling the horizon long into the evening. Tangasdale Beach, HS9 5KW
www.isleofbarrahotel.co.uk
Tel: 01871 810383

Harris Hotel

Beautifully decorated bedrooms with just a tasteful amount of Harris Tweed combined with a fabulous restaurant make this hotel a real luxury stay. While the food is superb and the wine list extensive, the real indulgence arrives after dinner when cosy in a leather armchair you can taste your way through the largest selection of single malt whiskies offered in the Outer Hebrides. With over 100 different whiskies on display, simply choosing one is a challenge in itself. Scott Road, Tarbert, HS3 3DL
www.harrishotel.com
Tel: 01859 502154

Hebridean or Caribbean?
Only the weather gives it away



Stornoway is the
busiest Hebridean town

Created with
memory-map

Finish

Start

Pure manna for Hannah



Travelling by ferry is relaxed
and requires little planning



Splendid isolation

Paul Kirkwood scarpers away from the honeypots of Tour de France clamour and out onto some of the quietest lanes in the Yorkshire Dales, near Kettlewell

Words & photos Paul Kirkwood



HEADS UP

A half-day's riding in Yorkshire with several short, stiff climbs, and some flat stretches too

Distance: 23 miles

Big hills: none

Challenge: ★★☆☆☆

Cafe stops: 1



**23
miles**

It's a sunny Saturday in June and roads in the Yorkshire Dales are still thronging with cyclists trying out the route of the Grand Départ of the 2014 Tour de France. I'm not among them. I prefer to cycle alone, and so head to the quiet village of Arncliffe. Soon after setting off on my own tour, though, I face the same type of challenge as the Lycra-clad legions; I dare say they would cycle up the one-in-six incline, but I choose to walk it. The undulations, peacefulness and fine view across the deep, V-shaped valley of Cow Beck set the scene for what is to come.

These are the real Dales, seemingly distant from the tourist honeypots, and you can't get much deeper into them than on this ride. The farms hereabouts are the sort that I imagine get snowed in regularly for long periods in winter. Snowy days seem far away in flaming June; now, meadows are alive with buttercups and daisies. I pass a man sitting beside a minibus in a deckchair reading a book and surrounded by a sea of green — I thought I'd been a picture of contentment while fuelling up with a full English breakfast in the Cottage Tea Room in Kettlewell an hour previously. The cattle and sheep, many sitting, look equally at ease in this pastoral paradise.

As I approach the first cattle grid, I see a




Giant sky-mirror Malham Tarn is the biggest natural lake in Yorkshire

glinting corner of Malham

Tarn, always an irresistible lure and, on this occasion, well worth the subsequent two-mile diversion down a rough, stony track through a wood. I pass Tarn House, which was built as a shooting lodge and subsequently home to Walter Morrison, whose guests included Charles Darwin, John Ruskin and Charles Kingsley. The latter's *Water Babies* novel was supposedly inspired by the Malhamdale scenery. Today the house is owned by the National Trust and is a base for research and environmental education. I emerge from the trees just past the boathouse and rest overlooking the lake, the highest in England

and the largest natural lake in Yorkshire. On a still day like this, it is a place of almost spiritual tranquillity.

After the tarn, I start playing a game of peek-a-boo with Pen-y-ghent. Its profile is often compared to a crouching lion. I've never seen the likeness myself and this new angle makes no difference. The peak, unmissable at the top of another one-in-six hill, disappears as I plunge downwards, and then reappears, dappled in sunlight, above a drystone wall like a grand organ emerging from behind the stage in an old concert hall.

Probably the best view of the day comes on the long, gentle descent to Halton Gill 



STOP!



PUBS AND GRUB:

The Falcon Inn, Arncliffe. 01756 770205
thefalconinn.com. Ivy-clad pub with mullioned windows on village green.

The Queens Arms, Litton. 01756 770096
queensarmslitton.co.uk. 17th-century inn refurbished in 2012.

Katie's Cuppas. Within Holme Farm in Halton Gill. Twitter: @katiecuppastea.

BIKESHOP:

Riders Cycle Centre, Skipton, BD23 1UP. 01756 796844 and riderscyclecentre.com.

nestling in Littondale at the foot of the Horse Head hill. On reaching the village, I can't resist the minor 0.75-mile diversion up the road to where it ends at the hamlet of Foxup, if only to see what's there (two tents and two couples having what looks like a blissful lunch) and to experience the most tucked away place in the Dales accessible by road.

Tasting the difference

Halton Gill is gorgeous. Sainsbury's chose the village as the location for a feel-good Christmas TV ad in 2010 starring Jamie

Time to take some notes at Katie's Cuppas



Oliver and it's easy to see why. I pass a farmhouse dated 1641 and church converted into a house with beautiful garden. A bench under a large tree on the green makes a great rest stop. I head in the direction of signs to Katie's Cuppa, a quirky cafe within a farm that today operates an honesty box system, since Katie herself, her mother, the farmer's wife, tells me, is away at a duck race. You can help yourself to home bakes in the little barn, make your own drink (kettle provided) and consume it in the recess of another barn on the other side of the track with chairs and back issues of *Country Life*.

Seeking chilled refreshment I buy a brownie and proceed beside the River Skirfare to the Queens Arms for a soft drink on the tables outside. You don't get much passing traffic here other than the occasional cyclist. Facing the prospect of such a benign and flat final four miles further down the valley back to Arncliffe, I'm in heaven.

The village has a giant green typical of many in northern England. Such large, encircled and accessible areas of grass were a

Duck racing: every one's a maillot jaune



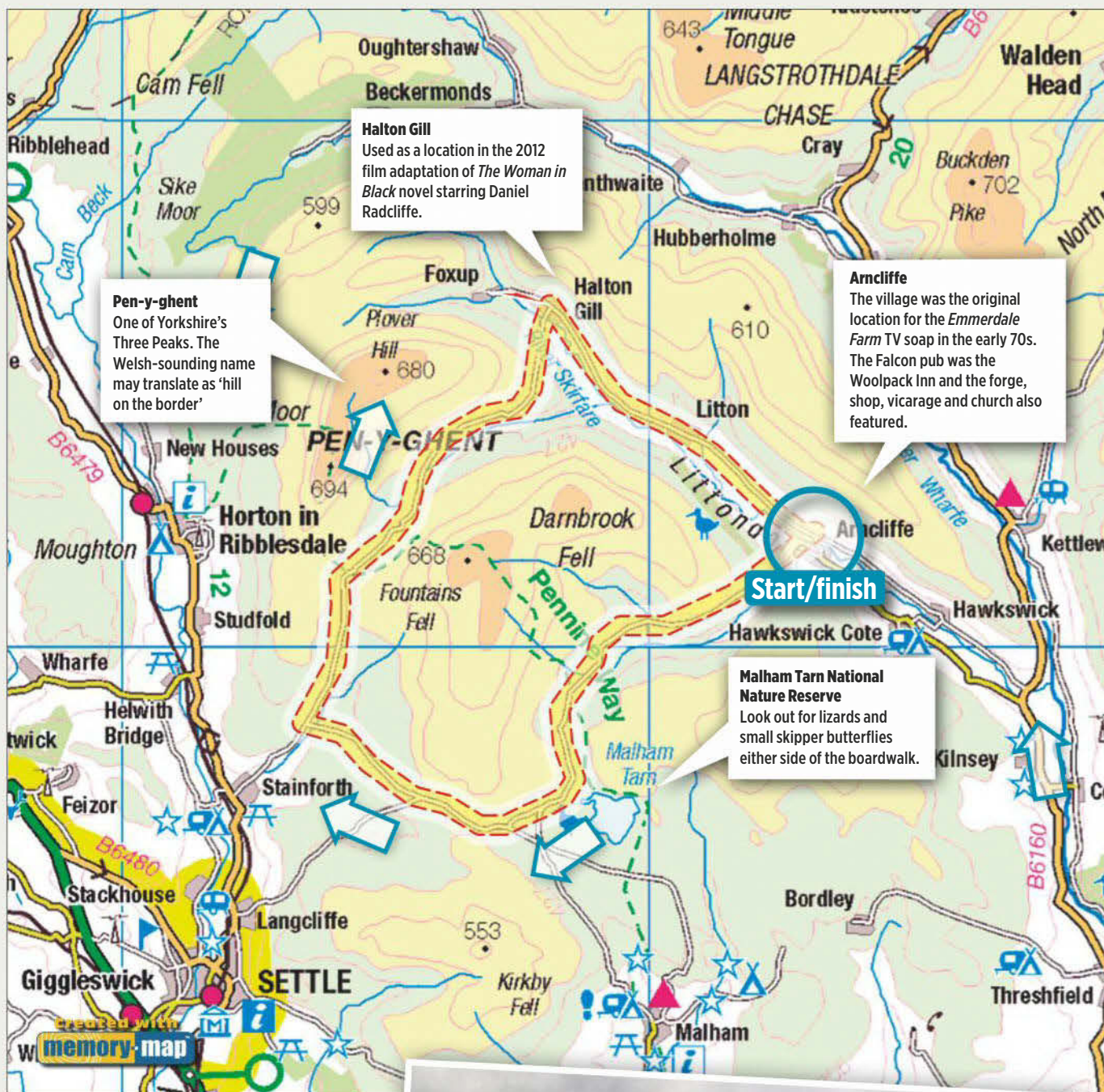
good place to drive livestock when the menacing Scots were lurking. Many of the surrounding houses are Grade II listed.

I spot a sign for teas. Keen to investigate further for the purposes of research, I push my bike along a path from the church, between two high hedges and into a field to come across a gathering of people standing on the bank of the river. What are they waiting for? I should've guessed: a duck race, perfectly English midsummer madness. Excitement mounts as the first of the 300 or so yellow, plastic wildfowl round the corner amid concerns that some have got caught up in eddies. I stay for the first few ducks to cross the line and wonder how Katie has fared. (Later, it turns out she was marshalling.)

I was happier to be with the crowds of this particular race than I'd have been with those hurtling around the route of that rather more significant race that visited last year.

Each to his own, I suppose.

End



ROAD BOOK

Start at Arncliffe. Head north-west out of the village past the Falcon and over a bridge, then turn immediately left. Stay on this minor road for five miles until nearing Malham Tarn. As the road bears right, fork left (easy to miss) onto a private road (but public bridleway) at a sign for Malham Tarn Estate. Pass Malham Tarn House and emerge from the trees for a good view of the lake then return the way you came but shortly before reaching the road fork left down a narrow, straight lane with postbox in the wall. At the end, turn left. Bear right at next fork and, at next junction, at a sign for Langcliffe and Settle, bear right again. After three miles and at a T-junction, turn right signed to Halton Gill. Stay on this road for about six miles to Halton Gill. To visit Foxup, turn left in the village, then back the same way. Alternatively, turn right in Halton Gill and follow the road via Litton to Arncliffe.



One-way climbs to contemplation

Dead-end climbs don't have to be roads to nowhere, as this Majorcan trio prove

Words Hugh Gladstone Photos Andy Jones

Perched on a wooded ridge high above the town of Felanitx, you can pick out the Sant Salvador monastery from halfway across the island. A five-storey, chunky stone block brutally occupying the highest peak on the hill, it presents an irresistible lure to cyclists out in the flatlands of eastern Majorca.

While it may be a gloomy February day back in the UK, the riding conditions on the Spanish island are

predictably gorgeous. Even this early in the year, the verges of the weeny, smooth-rolling lanes are flowered with yellow Bermuda buttercups that perfectly complement the higgledy-piggledy drystone walls, verdant meadows and deep-blue sky.

Although the main road drags out of Felanitx, the climb to Sant Salvador starts properly when you turn right through some gateposts. At first it drives in a straight line through fruit groves

towards the obtuse hill rearing up in front of you.

But as the gradient of the terrain steepens, the road buckles into a concertina of hairpins and clinging terraces that zigzag their way to the top.

Roads to somewhere

Normally my inclination is to avoid dead-end roads. When I glance over a map prior to a ride, I'm normally looking for loops. Retracing my tyre tracks is ►►



HEADS UP

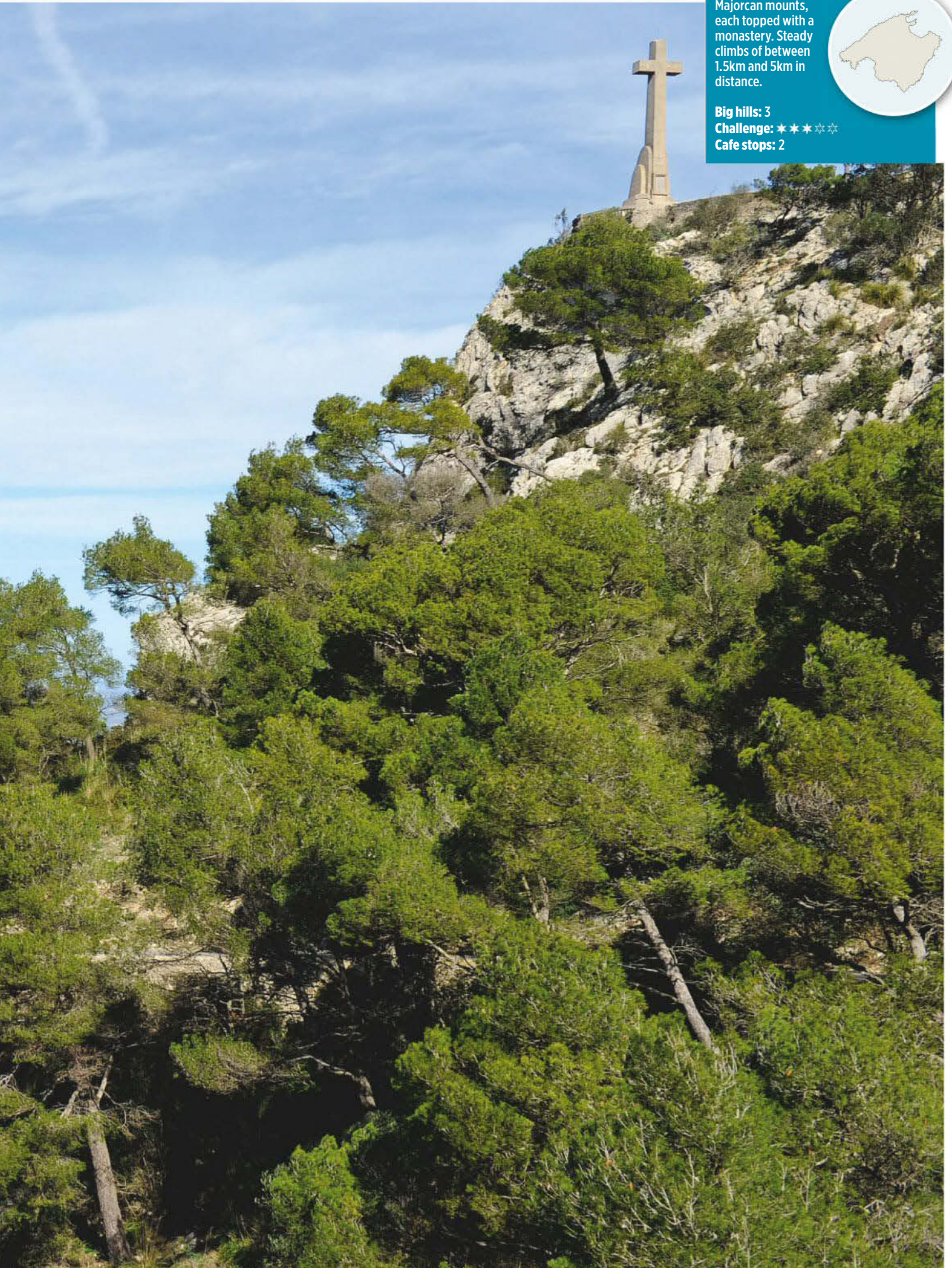
A triple whammy of Majorcan mounts, each topped with a monastery. Steady climbs of between 1.5km and 5km in distance.



Big hills: 3

Challenge: ★★☆☆☆

Cafe stops: 2





Top: The long, winding road to the top of the climb
Above: Bermuda buttercups brighten up the roadside
Right: The Sant Salvador Monastery that awaits at the summit of the climb
Middle right: The start of climb three in Randa

the kind of thing I will ride my road bike down muddy footpaths to avoid doing.

However, I've also always been lured by a certain magic in dead-end climbs. Maybe it's the Tour de France thing — some of the race's most iconic climbs are ski station cul-de-sacs. But I don't think so. More, I'm drawn by their sense of purpose.

By their very nature, most dead-end climbs have something at the end of them. If a road is just passing over a hill between other locations, there might be nothing there. But what's the point in maintaining a dead-end road up a hill, let alone building it, if there's nothing to be reached once you get to the end?

And often the destinations to be found on the top of these hills also carry a touch of the esoteric. Things that need to be in such a remote, high location include TV masts and military listening stations for the signal; religious institutions and nature reserves for the solitude; observatories for the clear skies and unpolluted air. And cafes for the slightly peckish cyclist.

Majorcan magic

Refuelled on a sandwich from Sant Salvador's small eatery, I zip up a lightweight windproof jacket and prepare myself for the return descent. It's an absolute rip, repeatedly switching back on itself like a farmer ploughing a field.

There are more fine lanes as I head north-west and my next destination: the Monte-Sion Monastery. I'm not alone in enjoying the Majorcan roads

"The destinations to be found on the top of these hills carry a touch of the esoteric"

for cycling. On the flats I pass a bright orange bike embedded in the verge. A sign hung from the top tube points down a gravel track and advertises a bike hotel.

Nearing the town of Porreres, I see the familiar kit of a well-known professional racing team, out on a group ride, streak across the T-junction ahead of me. In my hotel up in the north-east of the island, I know there are at least another half a dozen teams staying on for training camps after competing in the Challenge Majorca race.

The hotel has a hire fleet of over 2,000 quality road bikes that it loans out to visitors. And just round the bay, Sir Bradley Wiggins is ensconced in a flat he keeps in Pollença. Why?



Because this Balearic island is a little slice of cycling heaven.

Chill-out zion

While the towering climb to Sant Salvador is well known to the cyclists who regularly visit Majorca, less frequented is the ascent to the Monte Sion Monastery. Although it is perched on another hilltop, it's not nearly as high. Even from just a couple of miles away, it is a struggle to pick it out on the landscape.

Find it I do, though, and like the previous climb it starts with a long, steepening straight before folding into a handful of hairpin bends. At one point the road looks over a recycling centre but that quickly gets lost behind trees. You summit the 2km climb to brilliant

vistas, big skies and the stone monastery fronted by tall palms.

There's no one here except a kid who, on the way up, had roared past me on an exceedingly throaty motorbike. Now he's parked up at the edge of the car park, puffing on a cigarette. Below, in the valley, you can see heavy trucks on the move, but cannot hear them.

"It's beautiful," he tells me with a friendly smile. "I like to come up here to chill out."

Clambering up the steps into the monastery's courtyard, it is even more peaceful. The air is dead still in the enclosure, but wonderfully fresh. The only sounds are my cycling shoes on stone and the bright winter sun casts long shadows. »



“It breaks through forest into scrub and comprises long straights that lap up the hillside between hairpins”

Hermit hideouts

Onwards means downwards, retracing the route back down the hill. Next stop is the Sanctuary of our Lady of Cura, another hop, skip and jump west. There are no fewer than three religious institutions on the same mountain here, the upshot of the area's being seen as an ideal spot for the Middle Ages vogue of becoming a hermit. Across the island there are a few more hilltop sanctuaries, but daylight hours have dictated this one will be the last.

Oblivious to a crazy zigzagging back route from Lluçmajor that I only later notice on the map, I start the climb from Randa. Out of the village, it breaks through forest into scrub and comprises long straights that lap up the hillside between hairpins.

As it plateaus onto the summit, the road passes a fine selection of communication antennae ahead of a large car park for visitors to the monastery. On a summer's day, it must be a busy tourist spot, I imagine. But on this late winter's afternoon, just a handful of cars kick around in the car park and the occasional couple idly strolls around the monastery's yards, arm in arm.

The cafe here can be found at the back of the property with a long narrow terrace that catches the descending sun and offers a hazy view of the city, airport and bay of Palma. I retire with cake and a Coke to one of the tables. Those hermits would never have had such luxuries, but it seems, I have to agree, a fine spot for contemplation. **End**



Other great dead-end climbs

Puy-de-Dôme

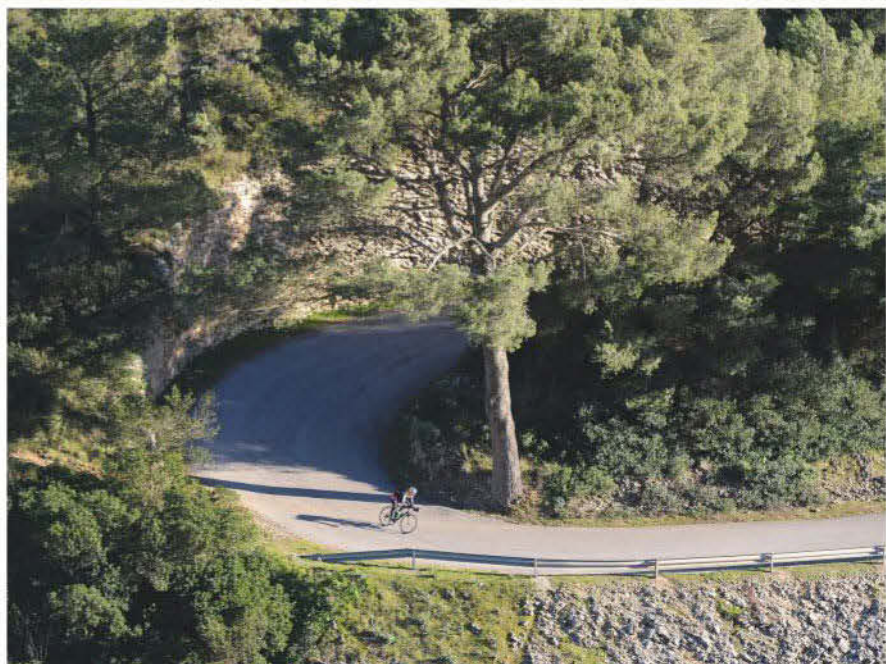
The Tour de France frequently finishes stages on mountain no-through-roads, but the Puy-de-Dôme just outside Clermont-Ferrand has the distinction of being a dead volcanic peak with a toll road that spirals around it to reach the top. The Tour has actually outgrown the climb in recent years, but its 4.5km of a steady 11 per cent has seen some classic stages and offers a fantastic view from the telecommunication masts at the top.

Great Dun Fell

Topping out with a radar station at 848m, Great Dun Fell, near Penrith in the Pennines, offers the highest bit of road in the UK. Technically a bridleway, cyclists can also enjoy the fact that the 7.4km climb is completely closed to public motor vehicles.

Haleakala

From sea level, this volcanic monster in Hawaii offers over 50km of continuous climbing. At the 3,000m-plus summit sits an astrophysical observatory which makes the most of the altitude, dry air and Pacific isolation for space research.





Santuari de Cura

Holes dug into the mountain where the first hermits lived can still be seen up at the top today. Majorcan writer and philosopher Ramon Llull was among those who made the mountain his home in the late 13th century. The road up there from the village of Randa is 4.8km and tops out at 545m above sea level.



Sanctuary de Sant Salvador

Perched atop the Serra de Llevant, this is the most spectacular of Majorca's hilltop monasteries, towering over the plain near Felanitx like some kind of Bond villain's fort. Five kilometres long, the switchback road up is well known in the world of professional cycling. Talented young Brit Simon Yates has set the fastest time up it on Strava and world champions' jerseys hangs in the entrance to the monastery.

Santuario de Monte Sion

At 1.4km and gaining just 100m of altitude through pine, carob and olive-covered slopes, the climb to Monte Sion is short and sweet. The shrine has sat at the top since the 15th century, while the sealed road up is the product of a single day's community work by the local population in 1954.



Above far left:

Taking a break at Monte Sion

Above left: World champions' jerseys hang in the Sanctuary Sant Salvador

Far left: Out of the main season the roads are quiet

Left: Even in February the weather is perfect for cycling



STOP!



EATING, DRINKING

The mountaintop **Sanctuary de Sant Salvador** and **Santuari de Cura** both have cafes on site serving sandwiches, cakes and drinks. Other eateries can be found in en route towns of **Felanitx**, **Porrires** and **Randa**.

WHEN TO GO

January-April. It's low season: rooms are wonderfully cheap, roads are quiet and the temperatures are generally favourable for cycling.

WHERE TO STAY

CA stayed at Iberostar's Playa de Muro complex (tinyurl.com/opnwb63) near Alcudia in the north of island. Directly catering to cyclists in the spring, it has an on-site bike shop, extensive secure cycle storage, Shimano-Ultegra equipped carbon road bikes (including your choice of clipless pedal) for hire, spa, pool and gym areas, bike wash and maintenance facilities plus all manner of carbs and proteins on offer in the breakfast and kitchen buffet. Ideally located for this ride, however, are the Reco de Randa (www.esrecoderanda.com) at the foot of the final climb, or the Sant Salvador hotel (www.santsalvadorhotel.com/uk) built in the old monastery buildings at the top of the first.

GETTING THERE

Easyjet and Ryanair fly direct to Palma from London Gatwick and London Stansted year round.

British Airways, Jet 2, Monarch, Iberia, Air Berlin, Air Europa and Swiss fly to Palma offer flights from a variety of UK airports on a more seasonal basis.

CA hired a car with Goldcar Rental. www.goldcar.co.uk.



Dam buster

Doing his best to avoid Amsterdam's seemingly unavoidable tourist vices, *Steve Shrubsall* hires a bike and gets merrily disorientated

Words and photos Steve Shrubsall

If you find yourself in Amsterdam, one of two things is going to happen. No, not those two; well, maybe those two, but on a slightly more wholesome note: a) you will get lost, and b) it will happen on a bicycle.

I have a theory that may explain the monumental number of cyclists pedalling around the Dutch capital: simply, they are in a perpetual state of disorientation. One arrives at Schipol airport, boards a city-centre bound train, alights and immediately notices that everyone, everyone, is riding bicycles.

When in Rome, so to speak, find a bike shop, part with €16 for a day's hire and hightail away into the ether — blissfully unaware that you will never see that rental establishment again, let alone your deposit.

Yet I jest — kind of. You will see that rental establishment again, but only after having scoured every square-inch of the city looking for it. And therein lies the kicker. Unwittingly, your trip to Amsterdam,

a capital city among the most beautiful and charismatic on the planet, will become a thorough and comprehensive tour, at the cessation of which you will probably have a deep affinity for tulips, clogs, canals and the word 'jah'.

My own adventure started, of course, at a bicycle rental shop, or Bike City, as it was known. Along with my steed, a hub-gear-operated machine fresh from *Mary Poppins*, I was also issued with a map of the city, instructions on how to use the lights and the locks, and a big beaming smile as I bade the proprietor good day and trundled away into the intricately woven tapestry that comprises the 'Dam.

"Make sure you have the bike back in 24 hours," came the cry from behind me.

I had no time to respond. I was instantly swept into the torrent of cyclists keenly crunching down on the cranks, eyes fixed on the horizon — locals, obviously. It's actually incredibly easy to differentiate between visitors and natives: the

Above: City of cycling, Amsterdam shows the rest of Europe what bike-love really means

Below: There's no shortage of coffee shops, selling all manner of, erm, stimulating fare

latter are rarely seen brandishing the Kodak, or scrutinising the map, or riding headfirst into the canal. More notably, they have an aura of a people who know where they're going, people who aren't hopelessly lost, people, perhaps, who have a chance of seeing their loved ones again.

Determined not to fit into the tourist category, and to demonstrate the devil-may-care, seasoned excursionist in me, I pushed up the revs and made a beeline for, well, nowhere in particular. However, as luck would extraordinarily have it, I manoeuvred out from the inner-city

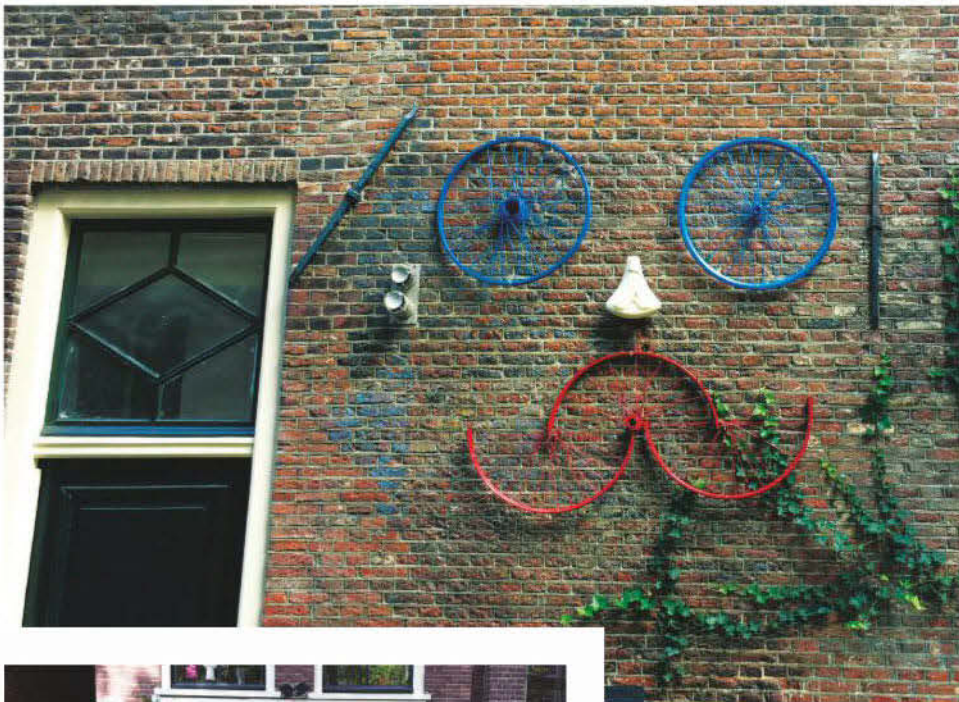


HEADS UP

A city cycling break in charismatic Amsterdam — the darling of the Lowlands

Distance: six intermittent hours in the saddle at a steady, pootling pace

Challenge: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Watching the last rays of sunlight climb the walls

maelstrom and met the gates of Vondel Park, Amsterdam's largest expanse of greenery.

Only 15 minutes into the ride and I found myself becoming rather endeared to the *Mary Poppins*-style tourer. She was a bit like Mary herself: reliable, practical, made children laugh — and now, as I freewheeled around the billiard-table-smooth paths of the park, breathing in the late summer air, I was in half a mind to break airily into song. *Chim-chim-cherree!*

It was after exiting the park that things turned decidedly interesting, or pear-shaped, if you will. My map, which must have taken the cartographer several aeons to produce, proved to be of little help, so I had to rely on the kindness of strangers to point me on my way.

"Yesh, itsh just over the canalsh," piped up a policeman in that charming Anglo-Dutch vernacular when asked directions to Anne Frank's house.

"Schwing a right at the interscection," crooned an affable chap in full cycling garb upon being queried as to the whereabouts of the Heineken Brewery.

"Over there, passht the shecond coffee shop on the left," a curiously languid fellow in his late teens slurred after being quizzed regarding the

Oude Kerk's location. Despite their concise instructions, I invariably found myself sucked into the vast vacuum of the metropolis and spat out in a totally random part of the city. *Chim-chim-cherroo!*

Had I been using my Garmin for this little outing, the resulting Strava visuals would have been reminiscent of a go I once had on an Etch-a-Sketch... after an espresso and Glenfiddich binge.

Nevertheless, though I was all at sea, somewhat confused and, by now, riding the wave of rush-hour traffic, I was still having a pretty good time. I'd stop every now and then, whet my whistle with a glass of the local brew and watch the world go by. Amsterdam, though it boasts myriad landmarks and places of interest, truly could hold an audience captive on any given street corner.

Ignoring red lights

On one occasion I even happened upon a robust assemblage of sparsely clad females flaunting their wares in shop windows; 'a novel and interesting way of shelling undergarmenchs,' I thought.

Other trip highlights included a delectable cheese platter, partaken of in an undisclosed location. And a plate of traditional Dutch fare, consisting of croquette, toast and

Above (clockwise from bottom left):

Finally, lager-guided, he finds the bike hire shop; the Dutch love bikes so much they decorate walls with them; canals are a welcome landmark by which to navigate

STOP!



GETTING THERE

Steve took the Eurostar via Brussels, but a more affordable, not to mention quicker, alternative is to fly with Easyjet into Schipol where a 20-minute-train journey will chauffeur you into the thick of it.

EATING AND DRINKING OUT

Amsterdam, as expected of a capital city in Europe, boasts an eclectic range of edibles. Go Dutch with a plate of croquette — mashed potato, shellfish, ground meat, cheese and vegetables fried in breadcrumbs until crispy. Wash this down with a liberal measure of Heineken to totally authenticate the Dutch dining experience.

dressed salad, all washed down with the requisite gulp of Heineken, and all, of course, consumed to the backdrop of canals, now shimmering in the early evening sun.

Finally, after a combination of stealth, strategy, guile and an intuition afforded only to those who have recently imbibed a stiff quota of premium lager beer, I arrived back at the bicycle hire shop, happily located next to my accommodation.

At supper that night, in another charming little waterside hostelry, I pored over the map in an attempt to chart a semblance of the day's route, and yes, my topsy-turvy meanderings on the *Mary Poppins* had taken me on a city-wide sojourn — an inadvertent triumph; the lowlands had been conquered! The only battle I had now was one with the bulge... *belch... hic.* **End**

Things to do July and August

With summer coming to the boil, now is the ideal time to find an event that suits you

Key to regions



Photos: Daniel Gould, Chris Catchpole, Phil O'Connor, Rupert Fowler, Andy Jones

SATURDAY JULY 18

SE LONDON THE OPEN WHEEL: LONDON BREAKFAST RIDE

HQ Gillet Square, Dalston,
London, N16 8AZ
How far 20 miles
Entry Free

CA says The Open Wheel's series of free rides take place once a month around the roads of North London. This led ride is a great excuse to get out on your bike, and it's only 20 miles long. Finishing back at a cafe you can tuck into a well-earned Saturday morning breakfast.

@TheOpenWheel
www.theopenwheel.com/rides

SW SOMERSET WIGGLE MENDIPS

HQ Stroud College Sports Centre,
Church Street, Street, Somerset,
BA16 0AB
How far 54/73/97 miles
Entry £23/£33

CA says These routes will take you on a tour through the heart of the Mendip Hills. You can jump into the saddle for either 54, 73 or 91 miles to see some of the area's beauty spots, like Chew Valley, Blagdon Lake and take on two gorges: Burrington Combe and the famous (or infamous) Cheddar Gorge. This event normally fills up so head promptly to the website to enter.

@ukcyclingevents
www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk
CF/EM/ET

SUNDAY JULY 19

SE SUSSEX BIG ROAD RIDE

HQ Imberhorne School,
East Grinstead, RH19 1QY
How far 10/40/60 miles
Entry £30

CA says This charity ride has been set up to raise funds for local hospice care. Why not try to get your supporters to sponsor you, or you could make a donation on the day. All members of the family are encouraged to attend with a 10-mile fun route on offer, or there are 40 and 60-mile routes on roads and cycle paths to get you out around Surrey and Sussex.
tinyurl.com/k3twlns
ET/FS/ATC

SW SOMERSET GREAT WESTON RIDE

HQ Long Ashton Park & Ride,
Bristol, BS3 2HB
How far 56 miles
Entry £26.50

CA says This point-to-point ride begins in Bristol to arrive, 56 miles later, by the seaside at Weston-super-Mare. The route will pull you through the lanes of North Somerset up over the Mendip Hills and through the Somerset Levels. Fitter riders may want to go hard from the start, but if you fancy a more leisurely ride then why not stop along the way and sample the stunning Somerset scenery.

@GreatWestonRide
www.greatwestonride.com
FS/ATC/EM

SE LONDON LONDON TO SOUTHEAST

HQ Victoria Park,
Tower Hamlets, E9 5HT
How far 52/65 miles
Entry £21.50

CA says Help raise some much needed funds for the British Heart Foundation and get a few miles under your belt at the same time. From East London's Victoria Park you'll be quickly out of town and meandering through the villages of Mountnessing, East Hanningfield and Rochford before crossing the finish line at Priory Park in Southend.

@BikeEventsTeam
www.bike-events.com/
london-southend
FS/ET/ATC

SCOTLAND MACMILLAN CYCLETTA SCOTLAND

HQ Scone Palace, Perth,
Scotland, PH2 6BD
How far 20/50/100/150km
Entry £33/£38/£47/£52

CA says Sorry gents but this is one for the ladies, on routes through the countryside of Perth, Scotland. As always, this Cycletta starts with a stunning backdrop. In this case it's the dark-bricked building of Scone Palace. Adding to their usual distance options there is now a 150km route for those of you that eat up miles for breakfast.

@HumanRaceEvents
www.humanrace.co.uk
CF/ET/FS



Don't take the risk.
Protect yourself, your
bike and accessories.

cycleplan keeps you on the road





Enjoy the romance of Constable country in the Suffolk Spinner, July 19

E ESSEX **RIDE IT ESSEX**

HQ Secret Nuclear Bunker, Crown Buildings, Kelvedon Hall Ln, Brentwood, CM14 5TL
How far 14/36/68/101 miles
Entry £7.50/£18.50

CA says If ever a ride started from an interesting location this one surely takes the crown. The Secret Nuclear Bunker at Kelvedon was built to house many 'important' people during the Cold War. Perfectly situated to access Epping Forest you'll soon be rolling through quiet lanes and the Essex countryside. A rather flat profile means you could be clocking up some good times.
www.evanscycles.com/ride-it
FS/EM/ET

E SUFFOLK **SUFFOLK SPINNER**

HQ Otley College, Suffolk, IP6 9EY
How far 43/73/100 miles
Entry £25/£35

CA says The Suffolk Spinner is our sister magazine's seventh sportive of the season. This is a brand new ride for 2015 that starts from Otley College and heads for the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB. The longer route reaches as far as Dunwich on the coast, before turning inland along Roman roads to Peasenhall with its roaming peacocks. There will be massages waiting for you back at HQ.

[@BookMyRide](https://twitter.com/BookMyRide)
www.bookmyride.co.uk
CF/FS/EOL/EM/ET



E NORFOLK **THE ROUND NORFOLK EPIC**

HQ Great Yarmouth Racecourse, NR30 4AU
How far 200 miles

Entry £45
CA says It certainly is an epic, packing in 200 miles around the east of the

country. You've only got one day to complete this course, starting and finishing clockwise from Great Yarmouth and then following the coast all the way back to the finish in Great Yarmouth at the racecourse.
www.cyclesportivesuk.co.uk
CF/FS/ET/EM

WM WARWICKSHIRE **TOUR OF COTSWOLDS**

HQ Shipston On Stour Rugby Club, CV36 4BH
How far 50/80 miles

Entry £25
CA says Now in its fourth year, this sportive rolls through the north side of the Cotswolds travelling through the area's picture postcard villages. There

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will be a few climbs to tackle including Stanway, Fish Hill and Dover's Hill. The latter was the venue of the 2010 National Hill-Climb Championship.
www.velosportives.co.uk
CF/FS/ET

NTW CUMBRIA TOUR OF THE HIGH PASSES (PART OF THE LAKELAND CLASSIC SERIES)

HQ Coniston School, Coniston,

LA21 8EW

How far 51/91 miles

Entry £25/£30

CA says This is the second in the Lakeland Classic Series that kicked off with the Shap Spring Classic. This one really ups the ante with some of the areas toughest passes including Wrynose, Hardknott, Corney Fell and Dunnerdale Fell. The short 51 miles racks up 1,900m of climbing with the 91-miler taking on a leg busting 4,000m. Try if you dare.

www.seismic-events.co.uk

CF/FS/ET/ATC/EM

JULY 22-26

SE LONDON, FRANCE LONDON TO PARIS

HQ Chessington, KT9

How far 300 miles

Entry £150 + £1,500 fundraising

CA says Registration has now closed but head to the website to register for next year. From Surrey you'll make your way to Portsmouth to catch the ferry, then pedal through the villages of northern France. Finishing at the iconic Eiffel Tower you can hang around and cheer on the pro peloton of the Tour de France, as it passes just round the corner on the Champs-Élysées.

@GreatOrmondSt

www.gosh.org/london2paris

CF/FS/ATC

SATURDAY JULY 25

NE NORTHUMBERLAND WOOLER WHEEL THE BIG'UN

HQ John Swan Livestock Mart,
Wooler, NE71 6SL

How far 207km

Entry £30

CA says This Wooler Wheel Big'un is just that; 129 miles with 3,200 metres total ascent. You'd better have your climbing legs with you! This route takes in the Scottish border town of Jedburgh before looping southwards to the Northumberland National Park and brushing by Kielder Water, a reservoir that is the largest artificial lake in the UK. The Cheviot Hills will offer the last few uphill miles before arriving back in Wooler.

@WoolerCycleHub

www.woolerwheel.com

FS/ET/EM

E ESSEX ESSEX CASTLE

HQ Kings Head Meadow,
Colchester, CO1 1YH

How far 25/50/75 miles

Entry £18.50/£19



Be a Peak District Pioneer
with *Cycling Weekly* on July 26

CA says This bike ride has been set up to help support Age UK. You can choose from three routes of 25, 50 or 75 miles through the Essex countryside. All routes are nicely undulating so you can enjoy the passing scenery without worrying about being bent over the handlebars.

@BikeEventsTeam

www.bike-events.com/essexcastle

FS/ET/ATC

S HAMPSHIRE WIGGLE MEGA MEON

HQ South Downs College, Waterloooville,
PO7 8AA

How far 44/72/102 miles

Entry £23/£33

CA says The Meon Valley offers up patchwork countryside with the hills of the South Downs just on its doorstep. After the final climb you'll be rewarded with views over the Solent to the Isle of Wight. You may even be able to make out Portsmouth's famous Spinnaker Tower.

@ukcyclingevents

www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk

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SUNDAY JULY 26

SE LONDON LONDON TO CAMBRIDGE

HQ Lee Valley Leisure Centre,
Pickett's Lock, London, N9 0AS

How far 60 miles

Entry £20

CA says The ride finishes in the university city of Cambridge on Midsummer Common. There will be a party atmosphere with music, refreshments and even a massage to

soothe those tired legs. This 60-mile route will start from Pickett's Lock in north London and travel through Roydon, Langley and Whittlesford.

@BikeEventsTeam

www.bike-events.com/londoncambridge

ET/ATC

EM DERBYSHIRE PEAK DISTRICT PIONEER ADVENTURE CROSS

HQ Bakewell, Derbyshire

How far 46/68 miles

Entry £25/£35

CA says This Adventure Cross event will take on a mixture of lanes, bridleways, limestone tracks and roads through the Peak District National Park. You'll take on the Monsal Trail, Pennine Bridleway and loop around High Rake and Longstone Moor. Remember off-road miles generally equate to twice that of road miles, and you'll need either a cross or mountain bike to tackle this one.

@BookMyRide

www.bookmyride.co.uk

CF/FS/EOL/ET/EM



S GLOUCESTERSHIRE RIDE IT COTSWOLDS

HQ Didmarton Village Hall, The Playing Field, Didmarton, GL9 1AH
How far 15/30/60/90 miles
Entry £7.50/£18.50
CA says After your jaunt around quaint Cotswold's villages between the flatlands of the River Severn and the Water Park, you can relax back at HQ and watch the pros on TV sweat it out on stage 21 of the Tour de France. This is one of the flatter rides on the Evans calendar.
www.evanscycles.com/ride-it
FS/EM/ET

NW CHESHIRE TORELLI JODRELL BANK SUMMER SPORTIVE

HQ Poynton Leisure Centre, Poynton, SK12 1PU
How far 30/65/100 miles
Entry £22.50/£27.50
CA says A rolling opening section takes you through the Cheshire Plains reaching as far as Crewe town. On the 65-mile route you'll loop back through the town of Congleton, into Wilmslow where the ride began. There will be quiet lanes and some great views of the radio telescope at Jodrell Bank.
@TeamTorelli
www.jbsummersportive2015.blogspot.co.uk
CF/FS/ET/EM

WEDNESDAY JULY 29

SE SURREY WORK FROM HOME

HQ Denbies Wine Estate, Dorking, RH5 6AA
How far 15/32/64 miles
Entry £23/£33
CA says This brand new event from UK Cycling is the perfect chance to get out on a fully supported ride during the week. Whether you're basking in the joys of retirement, self-employed or see it as a great opportunity to take a day off, you can avoid the weekend crowds and enjoy a day out on two wheels.
www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk
EM/ET/FS

SATURDAY AUGUST 1

NE NORTHUMBERLAND WIGGLE HELL OF HEXHAM

HQ Hexham Racecourse, Hexham, NE46 2JP
How far 52/87/100 miles
Entry £23/£33
CA says The North Pennines is the stomping ground for this one, whether you fancy taking on 52, 87 or 100 miles. You'll have views over the Tyne Valley, take on the climb of Coalclough and pass disused railway lines and out of season ski lifts high up in the mountains. Whizzing past Derwent Reservoir, you're on the home straight.
@ukcyclingevents
www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk
CF/FS/EOL/EM/ET

SUNDAY AUGUST 2

SE SCOTLAND TWO BRIDGES SIX PROVINCES CHARITY CYCLE RUN

HQ Scotmid Car Park, 55 The Loan, Queensferry, Edinburgh, EH30 9SD
How far 40 miles
Entry Sponsorship (no min amount)
CA says Leaving South Queensferry over the Forth Road Bridge the route is mainly flat and follows the picturesque Fife Coastal Trail, back over the Kincardine Bridge and return via the quaint fishing village of Grangemouth. There is also a shorter family route that leave from Lodge St. John Tulliallan No598.
tinyurl.com/i8qpqx
FS/EM/ATC

SE LONDON PRUDENTIAL RIDE LONDON

HQ Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, E20 2ST
How far 100 miles
Entry £58 or charity place
CA says You have to be quick off the mark to grab a spot on the ride. The ballot opens at 10am. Head with the luck. If you're bounced back in Feb, although charity places are also now closed, you can register interest if you want to take on the 100 miles through Surrey to finish on The Mall in the future.
www.prudentialridelondon.co.uk
FS/EM/ATC/ET

EM DERBYSHIRE RIDE IT PEAK DISTRICT

HQ New Mills School, New Mills, High Peak, SK22 4NR
How far 12/30/55/80 miles
Entry £7.50/£18.50
CA says Evans claims that this is one of their hardest rides, and so you'll notice that the miles are relatively low. Bunsal Cob, Mam Tor and Snakes Pass are just a few climbs that feature on the route, that will have you pushing around the Peak District National Park.
www.evanscycles.com/ride-it
FS/EM/ET

NW SHROPSHIRE SHROPSHIRE MYND

HQ Ludlow Racecourse, Broomfield, SY8 2BT
How far 84 miles
Entry £35
CA says Rolling through the Shropshire Hills you'll get to tick off the iconic Long Mynd Burway climb, and as an added bonus the climb of Long Mountain will feature twice so you can tackle it from both sides. This will be a tough and relentless 84 miles clocking up 2,000 metres of total ascent.
www.kilotogo.com
FS/EM/ET

C BERKSHIRE THE WOODCOTE CHILTERN CLASSIC

HQ Z event field, Woodcote, RG8
How far 77/100/135km
Entry £22/£23/£24
CA says The maximum gradient you'll have to contend with on all the routes here is 14 per cent. It's going to be a testing but doable day out. The longest route of 83 miles falls just short of 2,000m height gain. You'll make your way through the Thames Valley to climb the south side of the Chilterns and tick off a few well-known climbs: Whitchurch and Streatley Hill.
@cyclospartive
www.southernsportive.com
FS/ET/ATC/EM

SATURDAY AUGUST 8

SE SCOTLAND GALLOWAY RECYCLE

HQ Church Hall, St MarySt, Kirkcudbright, DG6 4AA
How far 30/67/103 miles
Entry £25
CA says From Kirkcudbright Bay you'll pedal towards Castle Douglas, past Old Bridge of Urr to reach the most northerly point, New Galloway. Just skirting the west side of Loch Ken you're then halfway, and on your journey home. The longer route takes in more of Galloway Forest Park meandering by the River Cree.
www.gallowayrecyclesportive.co.uk
CF/FS/ET/ATC/EM

Y YORKSHIRE WIGGLE YORKSHIRE TOUR

HQ Thirsk Racecourse, Thirsk, North Yorkshire, YO7 1QL
How far 37/79/101 miles
Entry £23/£33
CA says Ride on parts of last year's Grand Départ route through Yorkshire. Riders will pick up the pro route from Wensleydale in the Yorkshire Dales and head north through Swaledale to cross the river. You'll also see the stunning Aysgarth Falls before the last push along the final few miles to the finish.
@ukcyclingevents
www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk
CF/FS/EOL/EM/ET

AUGUST 8 AND 9

SW SOMERSET RIDE IT SOMERSET

HQ Ebborways Farm, Priddy, Wells, BA5 3BA
How far 15/37/66/87 miles
Entry £7.50/£18.50
CA says This ride take place on the Saturday and Sunday so take your choice or maybe take your chosen route on twice! From the heart of the Mendips the routes travel by the Chew Valley lakes and then head towards the coast at Weston Super Mare. Keep some fuel in the tank as you need to push over Cheddar Gorge — the sting in the tail.
www.evanscycles.com/ride-it
FS/EM/ET

SUNDAY AUGUST 9

NW CHESHIRE RISE ABOVE SPORTIVE BY MARK CAVENDISH

HQ Cheshire TBC
How far 80/120/185km
Entry £35
CA says This inaugural event will see you following the wheel tracks of the man himself: Mark Cavendish. If you can keep up then maybe you'll get a chance to ride with him around Cheshire and North Wales. You'll take on the Horseshoe Pass climb up to Llyn Brenig reservoir and whizz through the Flintshire countryside to finish back in Chester city centre where the roads will be closed — perfect for a Manx man style sprint finish.
www.cvndshsportive.co.uk
FS/EM/ET

E SUFFOLK SUFFOLK COAST

HQ Glemham Hall, Little Glemham, Nr. Woodbridge, IP13 0BT
How far 35/60/100 miles
Entry £18.50/£19

CA says For this bike ride you'll head east to take in the coastal town of Dunwich and its rolling open heathland. If you're game to take on one of the longer routes you'll reach as far as Covehithe, also on the Suffolk coast, dotted with church spires. Back at the Elizabethan mansion of Glemham Hall there will be massage, refreshment, live music and a bar so you can celebrate your ride.

[@BikeEventsTeam](#)
www.bike-events.com/suffolkcoast
FS/ET/ATC

X SCOTLAND TOUR O' THE BORDERS

HQ High Street, Peebles, EH45 8AG
How far 89/120km
Entry £55

CA says This closed road event will roll out from the Scottish town of Peebles, ideally situated to enjoy the remoteness of the Border roads. Talla climb will serve up the toughest challenge of the day, peaking at a gradient of 20 per cent. Spin your legs out by St Mary's Loch, in the Ettrick valley, before battling against gravity once more up Witchy Knowe and Paddy Slacks before descending into the Tweed Valley where your journey began.

[@tourotheborders](#)
www.tourotheborders.com
CF/FS/ET/ATC/EM

SE SUSSEX WIGGLE HAYWARDS HEATH HOWLER

HQ The South Of England Centre Ltd, Ardingly, RH17 6TL
How far 47/72/103 miles
Entry £23/£33

CA says As promised, your legs will be howling with lots of short sharp climbs racking up 2,500m of total ascent on the longest route. The longest climb of the day will take you up Ditchling Beacon and there will be a chance to

rest the legs as you spin through Weir Wood and past Ardingly Reservoir.

[@ukcyclingevents](#)
www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk
CF/FS/EOL/EM/ET

SATURDAY AUGUST 15

X SCOTLAND LOCHABER 100

HQ Kilmallie Community Centre, Corpach, PH33 7JH
How far 62/100 miles
Entry £25

CA says Choose from a lumpy 100-miler or take in the 62-mile course that is billed as being "almost completely flat" as it leads riders around the shore of Loch Eil and the west side of Loch Linnhe. This ride has been set up to help raise funds for Fort William Baptist Church in conjunction with Tearfund Cycling.

www.tearfundcycling.btck.co.uk
CF/FS/ATC/EM

S GLOUCESTERSHIRE WIGGLE COTSWOLDS

HQ Cheltenham Racecourse, GL50 4SH
How far 40/75/105 miles
Entry £23/£33

CA says Leaving from Cheltenham Racecourse, where many a Gold Cup has taken place, the ride leads out onto relentlessly rolling lanes. It's not long before the climbs through the Cotswold Hills rear up, whichever route you choose to take on. Pick up some time on the rolling lanes back to the finish and hopefully get your own gold standard time.

[@ukcyclingevents](#)
www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk
CF/FS/EOL/EM/ET

SUNDAY AUGUST 16

Y YORKSHIRE ACTION YORK 100

HQ Sports Centre, University of York, YO10 5DD
How far 40/64/99 miles
Entry £25/£38

CA says From the city of York you can tick off a few of the county's gems like the Yorkshire Wolds, Howardian Hills and the flatlands of the Vale of York.



Give the legs a rest by Ardingly Reservoir on August 9

You also pass by the impressive Castle Howard stately home. Choose from 40, 67 or an adventurous 102 miles.
www.action.org.uk/york-100
CF/FS/ET/ATC/EM

SW DEVON JURASSIC CLASSIC

HQ Imperial Recreation Ground, Exmouth, EX8 1DG
How far 50/100/160km
Entry £18/£28/£30/£45

CA says Help raise money for Prostate Cancer UK and tuck into homemade cakes and delicacies. But before that you're going to have to take on a few Devonshire hills and navigate the lanes that weave between the Blackdown Hills and Dartmoor National Park.

[@ProstateUK](#)
www.jurassicclassic.org.uk
FS/ET/ATC/EM

S HAMPSHIRE RIDEIT LIPHOOK

HQ Bohunt School, Longmoor Road, Liphook, GU30 7NY
How far 15/30/60/90 miles
Entry £7.50/£18.50

CA says The Evans Ridelt events always

cater for every type of rider, and this is no exception with route distances from 15 through to 90 miles, so you can get all the family involved. Tucked onto the edge of the South Downs, Liphook is your HQ so you'll be doing some climbing up and over the National Park.
www.evanscycles.com/ride-it
FS/EM/ET

SW SOMERSET SADDLEBACK SODBURY SPORTIVE

HQ Chipping Sodbury Rugby Club, BS37 6GA
How far 30/60/100 miles
Entry £20/£29

CA says This route is peppered with short, sharp climbs some maxing out at 20 per cent. The route will pull you through the southwest side of the Cotswolds through the quaint villages of Hawkesbury Upton, Tetbury and Uley. Here you brush by the River Severn for a flat few miles before turning back in to Chipping Sodbury where you can tuck into some hot food.

[@SodburySportive](#)
www.sodburysportive.co.uk
CF/FS/ET/ATC/EM



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**WM WARWICKSHIRE
THE GREAT
SHAKESPEARE RIDE**

HQ Stratford Manor Hotel, Stratford-upon-Avon, CV37 0PY

How far 40/62/100 miles

Entry £25/£26/£28

CA says As if riding a sportive wasn't challenge enough, this event now has a new feature for 2015 with its Hill Climb Challenge. This will come at 17-miles on Lady Elizabeth Hill in Tysoe, so your legs will be in good shape if you fancy going for a KOM; it's 1.4km long with an

average eight per cent gradient.
www.thegreatshakespeareide.org.uk
FS/EM

**NW CHESHIRE
TORELLI RONDE VAN
CHESHIRE**

HQ Poynton Leisure Centre,

Poynton, SK12 1PU

How far 30/60/100 miles

Entry £22.50/£27

CA says This ride starts out from Poynton Leisure Centre and leads riders out onto the quiet lanes of the county of Cheshire. There is a route for all abilities — a nice 30 miler for the leisure cyclist through to a 100 miler for the club rider.

@TeamTorelli

www.rondevancheshire.blogspot.co.uk
CF/FS/ET/EM

**E ESSEX
THE ONLY WAY**

HQ Weston Homes Community Stadium, Colchester, CO4 5UP

How far 50/73/102 miles

Entry £23/£33

CA says Summer is the perfect time to get a 100 mile ride under your belt, so why not give it a go around Essex

— known for its flat to rolling terrain. The route will tip over into Suffolk and through the picturesque medieval town of Lavenham. And if you're a *Game of Thrones* fan you might be interested to know that the village of Burges in Essex holds an account of a dragon, back in 1405.
www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk
CR/EM/ET/FS

SATURDAY AUGUST 22

**SW DEVON
WIGGLE EXMOUTH
EX-TERMINATOR**

HQ Westpoint Arena, Exeter, EX5 1DJ

How far 42/60/93 miles

Entry £23/£33

CA says These routes will take you on coastal roads towards the seaside town of Sidmouth, so you can fill your lungs with sea air, before turning north to head inland. The 60 and 93-mile routes both venture into the edges of the Blackdown Hills before turning back through Craddock, Blackborough and Clyst St Mary to finish.

@ukcyclingevents
www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk
CF/FS/EOL/EM/ET

AUGUST 22-23

**NE TYNE AND WEAR
RIDE 24 HR
NEWCASTLE 2 LONDON**

HQ Newcastle TBC

How far 300 miles

Entry £199

CA says Take on 300 miles in 24 hours. The ride will be split into seven sections of 40-45 miles on a journey through the UK, including the Yorkshire Hills, the flat land of Lincoln before arriving in the capital. Why not get a team together and take on the challenge.

@ride24hr

www.ride24hr.com
CF/FS/ET

**IRELAND
THE SEAN KELLY TOUR OF
WATERFORD**

HQ Dungarvan Sports Centre,

Co. Waterford

How far 12/50/100/160km

Entry €25/€40

CA says Ride with Sean Kelly on his home turf around Southern Ireland. From the banks of the Colligan River you head westwards towards Cappoquin town to follow the River



Go crazy in the Malvern
Mad Hatter on August 23

Blackwater south to blast down coastal roads. There are accommodation links on the website for the Waterford area, so why not make a weekend out of it. www.theseankellytour.com CF/FS/ATC

SUNDAY AUGUST 23



SCOTLAND KEN LAIDLAW SPORTIVE

HQ Hawick Rugby Club, Mansefield Road, Hawick, TD9 8AW
How far 46/106 miles
Entry £23/£25

CA says The Ken Laidlaw sportive will traverse through the towns and villages of the Scottish Borders. The 106-miler will also take you past the largest Buddhist centre in Europe the Samye Ling Tibetan Monastery, and travel down quiet back roads with very little traffic. www.kenlaidlawssportive.co.uk CF/FS/EM

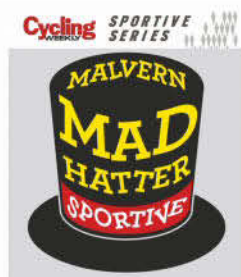


WORCESTERSHIRE MALVERN MAD HATTER

HQ Three Counties Showground, Malvern, WR13 6NW
How far 43/72/103 miles
Entry £25/£35

CA says Our sister magazine Cycling Weekly, will see the eighth, in its 10 event road series, head out around Malvern. The full 103-mile route will head through the three counties' of Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire with a nice climb up the

Malvern Ridgeway, where you'll be rewarded with views over the Black Mountains and Brecon Beacons of Wales. [@bookmyrideUK](https://twitter.com/bookmyrideUK) www.bookmyride.co.uk CF/FS/EOL/ET/EM



E NORFOLK PINWOOD CLIMBS

HQ Holt Rugby Club, Norfolk, NR25 6QT
How far 33/66/99 miles
Entry £15/£20/£25

CA says Norfolk may be renowned for being flat but there are times on this route you'll feel like you're pedalling through the Surrey Hills. There are 10 climbs over 33 miles clocking up 1,000 metres of total climbing, and you can do up to three loops of the course — kudos to those riders that can complete the full three.

[@cyclesportives](https://twitter.com/cyclesportives) www.cyclesportivesuk.co.uk EM/ET/EOL

S SUSSEX RIDE IT BRIGHTON

HQ Plumpton College, Ditchling Road, East Sussex, BN7 3AE
How far 12/30/60/90 miles
Entry £7.50/£18.50

CA says A ride around East Sussex would not be complete without the infamous climb up Ditchling Beacon and the stunning views that it offers from the top. You'll be able to glimpse the sea but won't quite make it that far, as the loop heads to Lewes before the homeward straight.

www.evanscycles.com/ride-it FS/EM/ET

E NORFOLK TOUR DE BROADS

HQ Strumpshaw Hall, Norfolk, NR13 4HR
How far 40/73 miles
Entry £10/£20

CA says Professional cyclist Dean Downing will be riding this year's event so why not head out and catch his wheel. The full route covers seven broads including Horning (River Bure), Wroxham (River Bure), Reedham (River Yare) and Stalham (River Ant), as well as 16 picturesque and quaint broads villages.

www.revolutionevents.co.uk/tour-de-broads FS/ET

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WALES TOUR DE MON

HQ Newry Beach, Holyhead, LL65 1YD
How far 40/75/103 miles
Entry £31.99/£35.99/£39.99

CA says The island of Anglesey hosts this sportive, which is now in its third year. It might only be a small area of land but it packs in nippy country lanes, rolling coastal roads and even a few mountains. From its start on Newry Beach the route makes an anticlockwise loop of the island and includes a flying mile, timed section on the runway of RAF Valley.

[@aaevents](https://twitter.com/aaevents) www.tourdemon.co.uk FS/ET/EM



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KIERAN BLAY (RIDES A SWIFT ULTRA VOX) ACCIDENT 11/02/15

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Your turn

Sole sister

A decent pair of cycling shoes can get you a long way, as *Julian Sayerer* discovers

Where cycling is concerned, I don't really believe in spending money on kit to improve performance. I suppose you can, and I understand why people enjoy the research, shopping and the newness, but I don't really believe there are many purchases more valuable in performance terms than some hours of extra training.

A pair of cycling shoes are one of very few things that cut against this basic rule of thumb of mine. Whenever I speak to people who are looking to improve their performance on a bicycle, one of the first things I'll ask is whether that person uses cycling shoes already. If the answer is 'no', then I'm generally happy to tell them that right there is a guaranteed 25 per cent improvement in waiting. Of course the 25 per cent figure is — in true fashion of quick statistics — plucked entirely from thin air, but the sentiment is, I'd say, pretty accurate.

The mechanics of this are pretty simple. It stands to reason that being clipped in means your leg is moving the pedal-crank-chain-wheel all through the pedal cycle and when your leg is going up as well as down. Less obvious, but just as important, is the rigid sole — whether hardened plastic or carbon fibre — that transfers the pushing force direct to the pedal without energy being absorbed (and thus wasted) in the cushion of a shoe designed for walking comfort. In cycling around the world I clocked up 18,000 miles of distance and — barring some mishaps with a broken

crank — every one of them was turned over in an SPD. I often consider how many extra miles of work done it would have equated to without a cleat bolted to a carbon fibre sole... by my crude 25 per cent statistic, it would be the same effort as riding 22,500 miles.

Alternative footwear

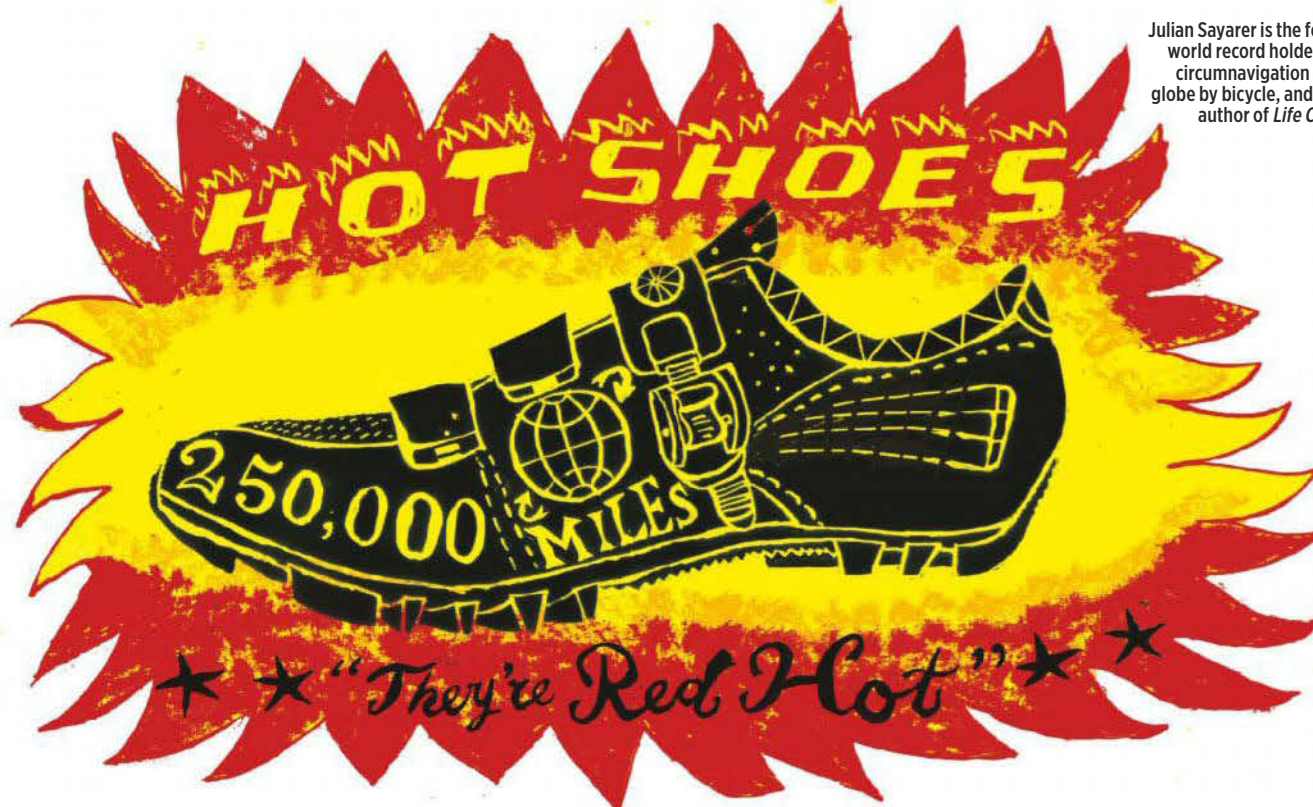
There are some drawbacks to cycling shoes and cleats, though not many, and you get used to them. A rigid sole is as perfect for pedalling as it is bad for walking around — when touring I'll often travel with a light pair of trainers or plimsolls for the in-between moments on foot. Being clipped to the pedal is, of course, also not always ideal in those moments when you'd like your foot to be moving fast to stabilise yourself on terra firma. This is certainly the biggest apprehension that keeps people off SPDs, and though I had my own (always comic, and only two of them) toppling over moments at a young age when the brain is less prone to worry, and the body is perhaps hardier, I'd say people always make the adjustment to cleats more easily than they initially suspect. SPDs certainly inspire less worry in me than a solid pair of toe-clips or straps, where I imagine my feet bound to the pedals by things that won't undo by a simple twisting of the foot. That said, I know many people who use both without any worry and like most things, it's simply a case of what you get used to.

For me, an awkward, irritating difficulty with cycling shoes has been saying goodbye

to them after so many long trips. Shimano used to do a really good, simple pair made from canvas that laced up and looked pretty much like a normal shoe (by no means a given). Gradually, over the years and thousands of miles, the material became more slack, until one day they ripped down the back, so that the shoe would no longer hold my foot and me and the shoes had to call it a day. This happened on the Place de la République, Paris, having just cycled in from Istanbul. In a nearby cycling shop, that same afternoon I began an unhappy relationship with a not very impressive pair of cycling shoes that, one year later, had to be thrown away because the plastic sole had split in two.

From there I moved to Bontrager; carbon fibre soles, a good ratchet, and nice colours that meant my shoes looked casual with a pair of jeans but still did the business if I wanted to go out for a proper ride. I bought those things in the spring of 2009, circumnavigated the world in them, and then must have clocked up at least another 10,000 miles in them as a London commuter and courier. 30,000 miles after I first bought them, in 2014 and on the east coast of Ireland, a plastic smell wafted up from the campfire around which some friends and I were drying our damp clothes and footwear. I looked down to see the plastic casing at the rear of my shoes melting away, the material at the back and toe already torn to holes and the things full of gaps that always leaked water. They are now kept in a box in my attic. I should probably throw them away.

Julian Sayerer is the former world record holder for a circumnavigation of the globe by bicycle, and is the author of *Life Cycles*.



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